

FAULKNER'S TREATMENT OF WOMEN  
IN HIS MAJOR NOVELS

A THESIS

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## PREFACE

This paper deals with William Faulkner's treatment of women in his major novels.<sup>1</sup> These major works of his time of genius began in 1929 with the publication of Sartoris, the first indication that he had settled upon both a place---the legendary Yoknapatawpha County---and a manner for his work. In the same year appeared The Sound and the Fury, one of the most important novels of the century. These two were followed by As I Lay Dying (1930) and Sanctuary (1931), both written quickly and as "tours de force." In 1932, Light in August followed and in 1936, Absalom, Absalom! These six novels have been referred to by many critics as the core of Faulkner's major achievement. The novels introduce the special world of Yoknapatawpha County and offer an elaborate description of its topography and its people.

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<sup>1</sup>Unfortunately, the most extensive studies of Faulkner's women, up until now, are unpublished theses. In "William Faulkner: His Characterization and Use of Women" (Ohio State University, 1957), the author views his women as four types of symbolic sinfulness.

Nancy McFadden, in "Faulkner's Women in the Structure of the Yoknapatawpha World" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1959), classifies women characters as weak, "relief figures," promiscuous, calm and serene, and strong and enduring.

Kay Francis Rasco, in "The Yoknapatawpha Women" (M.A. thesis, University of Mississippi, 1953), classifies women as ghosts of the past, women of the new order and Negro women. This paper was written before any of the above sources were available to the writer. I learned of their existence through a footnote contained in an article, "William Faulkner and the Southern Concept of Woman," which appeared in a Mississippi Quarterly and is cited in the bibliography.

Though The Unvanquished, published in 1938, is not considered one of his major novels, it will be considered here because it is closely related to Sartoris. Despite his long literary career then, which began in 1924 with the publication of a volume of poems, The Marble Faun, and extended to 1962 with the last of his published novels, The Reivers, I have chosen to confine my analysis to some of those female characters who appeared in the novels of his major years, the years 1929-1938, when he produced the bulk of his work.

Because of the abundance of women in these works, I have placed Faulkner's women in four groups, for convenience and precise critical analysis. It is hoped that a relatively close analysis of the women who fall in these groups will not only clarify understanding of these characters, but also lead to some conclusions about Faulkner's attitude toward women in general.

Chapter I is introductory. It presents the prevailing opinions of critics concerning Faulkner's handling of women. Generally, this criticism is negative and charges that Faulkner is biased against women, at least certain women. This chapter also tries to link Faulkner's concept of woman with the traditional Southern concept of woman.

Chapter II discusses those women who fall in the first group-- "The Unvanquished." This group is basically composed of those Negro

and white women who kept the plantations going during the Civil War or those who generally held their families together amid disruption and confusion.

In the third chapter, the "ghosts" are discussed. These are those de-sexed females---usually spinsters---who have lived for the greater part of their lives as barren "ladies". The implication is that their puritanical backgrounds have caused them to live such unnatural and tragic lives.

Chapter IV treats the "earth-mothers". Unlike the previous group, these women scorn traditional codes and allow their primitive female urges to dominate them.

In Chapter V attention is turned to the "rebels". These young girls are the complete reverse of the "chaste Southern lady", and they reject quite openly Southern ideals concerning womanhood.

The final pages of the paper are devoted to drawing some conclusions about Faulkner's treatment of women from the implications of the previous chapters.

I would like to acknowledge the counsel given me by Dr. R. K. Barksdale, and the cooperation of the Atlanta University library staff.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Leslie Fiedler claims that "for better or worse and for whatever reasons, the American novel is different from its European prototypes, and one of its essential differences arises from its chary treatment of woman and of sex."<sup>1</sup> William Faulkner's novels, he points out, do not escape this generalization. Maxwell Geismar, another critic, argues that Faulkner fears and hates women.<sup>2</sup> A milder charge and one more generally made is that Faulkner has no place in his consciousness for mature sexual love and that he writes about love between man and woman as an adolescent might, as "one who had never got beyond the youthful dream and therefore knew nothing about mature sexual relationships."<sup>3</sup> While it is true that Faulkner has found his special interest, as have many Western writers, in the failures of love---love violated, or love betrayed, or love perverted---it is absurd to say that one can not find in the body of Faulkner's works some examples of mature sexual love. Similarly, much of the criticism heaped on Faulkner concerning his women characters has been

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<sup>1</sup>Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Maxwell Geismar, "William Faulkner: The Negro and the Female," Writers in Crisis, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1942), p. 242.

<sup>3</sup>Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 206.

unfounded. For example, in his Love and Death in the American Novel, Fiedler gives a good deal of attention to Faulkner's attitude toward women and many of his comments are gross exaggerations. In general, Fiedler believes that Faulkner echoes in his fiction a great deal of the American male's typical antifeminism:

In the work of William Faulkner, the fear of the castrating woman and the dis-ease with sexuality present in the novels of his contemporaries, Fitzgerald and Hemingway, attain their fullest and shrillest expression. Not content with merely projecting images of the anti-virgin, he insists upon editorializing against the women he travesties in character and situation. No Jiggs and Maggie cliché of popular anti-feminism is too banal for him to use; he reminds us (again and again!) that men are helpless in the hands of their mothers, wives, and sisters; that females do not think but proceed from evidence to conclusions by paths too devious for males to follow; that they possess neither morality or honor; that they are capable, therefore, of betrayal without qualm or quiver or guilt but also of inexplicable loyalty...that they are unforgiving and without charity to other members of their own sex...that they use their sexuality with cold calculation to achieve their inscrutable ends. In no other writer in the world do pejorative stereotypes of women appear with greater frequency and on more levels, from the most trivial to the most profound; had Faulkner dared treat in such terms any racial minority, his books would have been banned in every enlightened school in the country...<sup>1</sup>

Other critics have also pointed out what they consider to be Faulkner's insistent negative treatment of women. Maxwell Geismar says that Faulkner can see humanity only in terms of its aberrations. In speaking of Faulkner's feelings of discontent over modern society and its inhabitants in general and women in particular, he writes:

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<sup>1</sup>Fiedler, op. cit., p. 320.

...we have also noticed where the crux of Faulkner's discontent has come to rest. As the series of women in Light in August are the factors of Joe Christmas's degeneration, we have seen Faulkner himself has focused his anger on the feminine portraits which mark his work as a whole. We recall Cecily Saunders, the "papier-mache Virgin" of Soldier's Pay. This "Virgin" turned into a vicious prostitute, the Temple Drake of Sanctuary. The neurasthenic Mrs. Compson of The Sound and the Fury, who is perhaps the most purely contemptible character in the novel. And even Caddy herself, the object of such intense devotion, on the part of Benjy and Quentin, whose sexual weakness is nevertheless the direct cause of their destruction. We remember the Belle Mitchell of Sartoris, whose effect, like that of Joanna Burden, was of a rich and fatal drug, "a motionless and cloying sea" in which the Faulknerian male watches himself drown.<sup>1</sup>

In a similar manner, Irving Howe expounds on Faulkner's inclination toward misogyny:

...Faulkner is all too willing to proclaim the subtle and insidious powers of women, to evoke a sense of their dizzying attractions, even to speculate, in the style of legend, on female malevolence as one of the root terrors of existence...seldom in Faulkner's work do we find a mature recognition of the possibilities in the relations, between men and women---possibilities, I might specify, of fulfilled love and tragic complication...Few writers have trained such ferocity on the young American bitch: Cecily the "papier-mache Virgin of Soldier's Pay, Patricia the "sexless yet somehow troubling" flapper of Mosquitoes, and the abomination of castrating femaleness, Temple Drake...<sup>2</sup>

Howe adds that Faulkner does not hesitate to permit his male characters to express their negative feelings about women:

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<sup>1</sup>Maxwell Geismar, op. cit., pp. 168-169.

<sup>2</sup>Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, 2nd edition, (New York: Random House, 1952), pp. 141-142.



In Absalom, Absalom! Henry Bon learns that "you can't beat women anyhow and that if you are wise or dislike trouble and uproar you don't even try to"---a lesson Faulkner never tires of repeating, though always with the certainty that men, being victims of themselves, must prove incapable of learning it. Quentin Compson goes further than Bon; "women," he says, "are like that...they have an affinity for evil." The Rev. Hightower urging Byron Bunch not to marry Lena Grove, remarks, "No woman who has a child is ever betrayed; the husband of a mother, whether he be the father or not, is already a cuckold...There have been good women who were martyrs to brutes...But what woman, good or bad, has ever suffered from any brute as men have suffered from good women?"<sup>1</sup>

Though Howe points out exceptions to this negative treatment of the sexes, he hastens to add that "so slight a weight, however, do these exceptions carry in Faulkner's world, that they cannot set up a counterpoise to the dominant attitudes felt and expressed toward women."<sup>2</sup> He concludes with a rather bitter indictment against Faulkner's treatment of his young females, in particular:

Faulkner's inability to achieve moral depth in his portraiture of young women indicates a major failing as a novelist...the distrust of women serves a symbolic function in the unfolding of his work. Women are the this-worldly sex, the child-bearers who chain men to possessions and embody the indestructible urge to racial survival...Faulkner's men, like Melville's are happiest when they "get away," escaping to the woods for a few weeks of femaleless companionship. His women are happiest...when men are subdued to their social tasks...<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Howe, op. cit., pp. 143-144.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 99-100.

Despite these critics' above-stated remarks on Faulkner's women, they do admit that he is not merciless in his attack on all women. Old women, Negro women, and essentially "sexless" women, they insist, escape his scorn. Howe, for instance, adds:

Such splendid old ladies as Miss Rosa Millard, Aunt Jenny Du Pre and Dilsey, all conspicuously beyond the age of sexual distraction, command Faulkner's unmixd admiration. They neither threaten nor attract, they give household orders and provide intuitive wisdom; they are beyond the magical powers of sexuality. But there is hardly a young woman in his books who does not provoke quantities of bitterness and bile; and so persistent is this distaste for the doings of "woman flesh" that it cannot be dismissed as a vagary of either Faulkner or the characters who convey it.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, another Faulknerian critic, Mary Robb, states:

...he never seems to make a reality of women unless they are what has been called "Southern madonnas of low mentality" or stubbornly old and tough like Miss Habersham or Aunt Jenny or Negroes like Molly and Dilsey and Nancy. Temple Drake in Sanctuary, Cecily Saunders in Soldier's Pay and Belle Mitchell in Sartoris never seem to come off; possibly because they are the sort of women they are, Faulknerian versions of the flapper, skinny, brainless, and oversexed. It is a type which has not appeared in his most recent work. They probably have no appeal to Faulkner because it is impossible to imagine such women facing with any compassion or courage a choice between good and evil.

But when Faulkner is free of these troublesome females...he is enormously successful. His old women---Aunt Jenny, Miss Habersham, Mrs. Littlejohn---are warmly drawn and happily convincing...Their responsibilities include their menfolk, servants, young relatives, and animals, toward all of whom they exhibit a disillusioned patience which Faulkner treats with respectful amusement.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Howe, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>Mary Cooper Robb, William Faulkner: An Estimate of his Contribution to the American Novel, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1957), pp. 41-42.

Fiedler also states:

Until his very latest books, Faulkner has treated with respect only females, white ladies or colored women past the menopause. The elderly maiden or widowed aunt is the sole female figure in his fiction exempt from travesty and contempt...<sup>1</sup>

Each of the above-stated comments would suggest that it is necessary to group Faulkner's women if one is to make any meaningful analysis of them.

In an attempt to categorize or type Faulkner's women and to separate those he admires or respects from those he does not, one critic has placed his women into two large groupings: the sexual and the asexual.<sup>2</sup> In fact, David Miller claims that the presence or lack of sexuality or "femaleness" is the primary determining factor in Faulkner's conception of female character:

Faulkner views his feminine characters according to their sex, rather than species, according to their fecundity and the animal attraction which it begets in man. The degree to which a character possesses this "femaleness" determines her relationship to plot and to other characters. In general, Faulkner places his women in one of two categories: they are either earthmothers or ghosts. The ghosts are either sexless, or their sex is ignored; the earthmothers are all of the female that is admirable, and despicable: in either case it is fertility (or the lack of it) which forms their characters...That sex is a method of classifying humans, not just men from women, but women from women according to the ounce or pound of their possession, is a key to understanding Faulkner's use of the human female...<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Fiedler, op. cit., p. 320.

<sup>2</sup>Irving Malin, William Faulkner: An Interpretation, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>David Miller, "Faulkner's Women," Modern Fiction Studies, XII (Spring, 1967), pp. 3-4.

It is clear that Faulkner himself had perceived this "sexual" classification or categorization of women at least by the time he wrote Absalom, Absalom! In attempting to account for Henry Sutpen's inability to understand his father's first marriage (with an actual ceremony) to a part Negro, Mr. Compson presents a direct statement of Southern gynolatry.

It would be the fact of the ceremony... that Henry would balk at...a youth with Henry's background, a young man grown up and living in a milieu where the other sex is separated into three sharp divisions, separated (two of them) by a chasm which could be crossed but one time and in but one direction---ladies, women, females---the virgins whom gentlemen someday married, the courtesans to whom they went while on sabbaticals to the cities, the slave girls and women upon whom that first caste rested and to whom in certain cases it doubtless owed the very fact of its virginity...<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note at this time that this ante-bellum categorization of femininity which Faulkner described was probably conceived of by him on the basis of actual Southern practice. Though seemingly ignored by many critics, Faulkner's concept of the Southern woman, biased and negative though it may seem, appears to have been influenced greatly by his knowledge of Southern history and the Southern concept of womanhood. Note the similarity in the following fictional excerpt from the remainder of the passage quoted above and a subsequent passage from a historical account of the South:

...Henry, young, strong-blooded, victim of the hard celibacy of riding and hunting to heat and make importunate the blood of a young man, to which he and his kind were forced to pass time away, with girls of his own class

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, (New York: Random House, 1936), p. 109. Subsequent references, which appear in the text, are to this edition.

interdict and inaccessible because of money and distance, and hence only the slave girls, the housemaids neated and cleaned by white mistresses or perhaps girls with sweating bodies out of the fields themselves and the young man rides up and beckons the watching overseer and says send me Juno or Chlory and then rides on into the trees and dismounts and waits...<sup>1</sup>

In the following historical account, a historian also comments upon the inaccessibility of the "pure" white female and the accessibility of the Negro slave girl.

Historically, the men of a master race have always made free with the women of a servant race. The degree of corruption, however, depends considerably upon what men think of these relationships...The height of the pedestal for the white woman was equal to the depth of the furrow in the high cotton for the Negro woman. To the degree that sex became the prerogative of the women of the servant race, it became the scandal of the women of the master race...he had to make the white woman an asexual angel to balance the highly sexed female he sought and found and created among the Negroes... the "white woman" became "an angelic being, hovering high above the earth"...<sup>2</sup>

One can indeed link Faulkner's female characters with the traditional Southern concept of woman. A comparison of his white women characters of the upper and middle classes with the Southern ideal of womanhood reveals, however, shocking deviations from the ideal as well as admirable women reflecting a different but not

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<sup>1</sup>Absalom, Absalom!, pp. 109-110.

<sup>2</sup>James McBride Dabbs, Who Speaks for the South?, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, Inc., 1964), pp. 102-104.

wholly incompatible ideal.<sup>1</sup> If Faulkner is "traditionally Southern"<sup>2</sup> in his attitude toward women, as some suggest, just what does this mean? The traditional ideal provides the code by which white middle and upper class women are brought up and judged in a region where the nineteenth century myth of the "immaculate young girl" has survived in an obvious manner. Note the origins of this traditional ideal of the "sacred woman," which has been so prevalent in the South:

The southern white woman, reared and nurtured in the tradition of "sacred white womanhood," has had to deny and purge herself of every honest and authentic female emotion that is vital to being a healthy woman...the southern white man created this myth to salve his own guilt...Certainly, the white woman in the South had been desexed enough already under the fierce indoctrination of puritanical asceticism. The white man's fear and guilt grew, as time went on, to an intensity that made him look around for even more stringent devices to ensure the "chastity" of his woman and to absolve himself further from guilt feelings toward his wife. There were two psychological processes going on in the Southerner's mind: one was the deep sense of guilt arising from his cohabitation with Negro women; the second was his sense of immorality about a society founded on the principles of human slavery. Somehow the entire "southern way of life," sexual and otherwise, had to be justified. The Southerner had to find or create a symbol, an idea of grace and purity, that would loom large in a civilization shot through with shame, bigotry,

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<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth M. Kerr, "William Faulkner and the Southern Concept of Woman," Mississippi Quarterly, XV (Winter, 1961-1962), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>This idea is advanced in "Visions of Southern Womanhood in the Writings of Tennessee Williams and William Faulkner" (M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1957), according to a statement which appears on the same page of the article footnoted above.

and the inhuman treatment of (at that time) nearly 6 million black people. Sacred white womanhood emerged in the South as an immaculate mythology to glorify an otherwise indecent society.<sup>1</sup>

This Southern ideal of womanhood, then, sets the pattern from which Faulkner's female characters tend to deviate. Consideration of the causes and consequences of Southern gyneolatry suggests why Faulkner rejects the ideal and why, in so doing, he may be revealing sympathy rather than scorn for some of his women characters whose deeds cannot be praised. That is, Faulkner did not seem to see anything positive about the role which Southern women were forced to assume because it enslaved her to the idea that no lady exhibits passion or sexual desire, simply because she has neither. Let us look at a documented explanation of what this myth has done to the South's white women so that we can better understand Faulkner's treatment of his women. In a passage describing the plantation world in which this gyneolatry was born, W. J. Cash relates what "woman" symbolized to the South:

The upshot...was downright gyneolatry. She was the South's Palladium, the Southern woman--- shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds, the standard for its rallying, the mystic symbol of its nationality in face of the foe. She was the lily-pure maid of Astolat...

Merely to mention her was to send strong men into tears---or shouts. There was hardly a brave speech that did not open and close with clashing of shields and flourishing of swords for her glory...The hypocrisy and sexual immorality of the South seem totally to escape the discerning

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<sup>1</sup>Calvin Hernton, Sex and Racism in America, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965), pp. 15-16.

powers of the southern white woman. Or perhaps it is her very knowledge of these things that has driven her, out of a sense of guilt, though complicity, to pretend that they do not exist, to shut her eyes and succumb to a mode of living and thinking that have all but dehumanized her.

As time went on, the southern white woman accepted the sterile role her husband insisted she play; she became a doll, an ornament, like a beautiful painting on a wall that is admired and given lip service by everyone but which is actually loved by no one...In the truest sense of the words, the white woman became chaste and she was left cold and alone...It is significant that even when white women are married and become mothers, southern white men still refer to them as chaste!<sup>1</sup>

This glorification and idealization of woman had worse results, as the above quote indicates, for women than for men. When men were repelled or rejected by the chaste and "sterile" women whose image they had created, they had recourse to unvirtuous white women or Negro women. For white "ladies," on the other hand, all emotion was dammed up, often without any outlet, legitimate or otherwise; the result was, at best, hypocrisy, at worst perversion of some kind. Rebellion also, which removed a girl from her social class, might save her from loveless hypocrisy.<sup>2</sup> Faulkner's novels often reveal the stifling and often tragic effects of the Southern woman's position in a society which has denied her opportunities for self-development and self-expression. Mr. Compson (Absalom, Absalom!), who voices the idea of the desexed Southern female, says, "Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the

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<sup>1</sup>W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), pp. 89-91.

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth M. Kerr, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 4.



ladies into ghosts."<sup>1</sup> Judging by some major and minor characters who seem to conform to the Southern concept of woman, it would seem that Faulkner, for reasons which will be explained later, both disapproves of this tradition as an ideal, and doubts the genuineness of women who seem to exemplify it on the surface.<sup>2</sup>

Those who tend to ignore the significance of sex and women in Faulkner's novels need to be reminded of the extent to which his works are saturated with sexual themes. Faulkner apparently believes that one shows human character more illuminatingly by placing a person in a sex situation and even more illuminatingly by placing him in an abnormal sex situation.<sup>3</sup>

For example, in The Sound and the Fury, the action focuses on the psychotic Compsons. There is Quentin, who loves not women but loves his sister Caddy with a veiled incestuousness, who broods on the mystery of the female and grows physically sick when he thinks of any other male becoming sexually involved with Caddy, and finally drowns himself rather than endure a life with his sister belonging to another man.

In Absalom, Absalom!, the first narrator, Miss Rosa Coldfield is a repressed old maid who had been on the verge of marriage to Colonel Sutpen but ended up a sexually frustrated, embittered

<sup>1</sup>Absalom, Absalom!, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth M. Kerr, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 5.

<sup>3</sup>Harry Modean Campbell and Ruel E. Foster, William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), p. 45.

old woman hating Sutpen. The central dramatic situation of the story involves young Henry Sutpen's love, which verges on the homosexual, for his half-brother, Charles Bon, and his perverted fascination with Bon's declared intent to carry through an incestuous marriage with Judith---Bon's half-sister and Henry's sister.

Light in August interweaves the story of an unmarried pregnant woman (Lena Grove), a puritanic spinster (Joanna Burden), and a disturbed part-Negro (Joe Christmas), who grows to hate all things feminine and finally murders his white mistress (Joanna), who had found twisted sexual pleasures in her relations with him.

In The Hamlet, there is a section called "Eula" showing the devastating effect which Eula, the personification of sex, has upon her virgin schoolteacher, Labove. His is a special kind of lust, a lust in the head as well as in the glands, and it is perverse and obsessive. The most grotesque of all the love affairs which appears in the novel is that of the idiot, Ike Snopes, for a cow and the most shocking scene is the one where he has to endure a public exhibition of his perverted sex desires.

In Sanctuary, the most criticized and reviled of Faulkner's novels, the male protagonist, Popeye, impotent from birth, violates the female protagonist, Temple Drake, with a corn cob in order to fulfill his sex cravings. Temple, portrayed as a real bitch, endures two rapes, the second of which leaves her a nymphomaniac. Horace Benbow, the lawyer, leaves his wife and passes through the story troubled by fantasies of incestuous love for his step-daughter, Belle.

This brief look at the subject matter of a few of Faulkner's novels reveals his enormous preoccupation with characters who are in some way abnormal. This Faulknerian characteristic is supported by Freudian theory. One of the most fundamental tenets of Freud's theory was to reduce human behavior to the dominant stimuli of the libido, that is sexual energy. Furthermore, Freud seems to assume that Everyman is a pervert in the sense that he has within himself in varying degrees the six abnormal tendencies: autoeroticism, homosexuality, masochism, incest, and exhibitionism. To a considerable extent, this is also the view we get from Faulkner.<sup>1</sup> To one who looks at the entire mass of Faulkner's work, it becomes apparent that very frequently sexual aberration marks his "sick" characters, while its absence is the stamp of his approved characters.<sup>2</sup>

Some of Faulkner's morally good women, whom he describes with admiration, are: Aunt Jenny Du Pre (Sartoris), Granny Millard (The Unvanquished), Lena Grove (Light in August), and Dilsey (The Sound and the Fury). They all possess certain qualities: simplicity, strength, mastery, stoicism, common sense, and a healthy sexuality. But, look at some of his weak or "sick" women: Joanna Burden (Light in August), Narcissa and Temple Drake (Sanctuary), Miss Emily Grierson ("A Rose for Emily"), and Rosa Coldfield (Absalom, Absalom!). They are misfits, eccentrics and neurotics and in most cases some sexual aberration mars them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Campbell and Foster, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 44-45.

Keeping in mind the importance of sex and the importance of the Southern concept of woman in Faulkner's treatment of women, I have chosen to place Faulkner's women in four categories: the "unvanquished," "the ghosts," "the earth-mothers," and the "rebels." Even though Faulkner's women are being treated in groups, this is not to deny or overlook their individual traits, which often transcend those of the group. It is also hoped that the reader will perceive important differences even among those members of the same group, just as there are differences among the women of separate groups. This would negate the idea that Faulkner's women are mere stereotypes who can easily be relegated to a category and dismissed. More importantly, however, will be the attempt to show to what extent the criticism concerning Faulkner's women is unfounded or the result of misinterpretation or a failure to analyze in depth the motivations and behavior of his women.

## CHAPTER II

### THE "UNVANQUISHED"

In order to understand Faulkner's characters, both male and female, it is important to realize that he deals heavily with Southern history, legend and myth. Though Yoknapatawpha County, the mythical region of North Mississippi which he created for the setting of his work, is not an actual place, it is similar to the actual Lafayette County, Mississippi, and contains the same groups of people which any typical Southern town contained during the years which preceded and immediately followed the Civil War. It is necessary now to examine, as precisely as is possible, just what, as Faulkner sees it, is the history of his world, Yoknapatawpha County. In outline it is this:

...First there were the Indians---Chickasaws. They were dispossessed and later evicted by white men. The most ruthless and rapacious of the white men became plantation owners, and exploited the land by means of a concurrent exploitation of Negro slave labor. These crimes brought a curse, fulfilled in the Civil War and the Reconstruction, which destroyed the plantation economy and the aristocratic families which had been founded on it. The land was overrun by a new race of exploiters, Northern carpetbaggers and native scalawags, who threatened and who still threaten to turn not only Yoknapatawpha County, not only the South, but the whole world, into a mechanized desert. But there are a few people who show promise of escaping, or expiating, or at least enduring and outlasting the curse, remaining human, responsible, and creative, and making

the world and the human race evolve into something better than either the past or the present.<sup>1</sup>

Generally, it is Faulkner's women---some of them, at least---whose responsibility is to endure, to carry on while the men go off to war, to keep the once proud families from crumbling completely, and to outlast the curse of slavery; they "remain human, responsible, and creative." War is indeed a situation which exerts perhaps the strongest pressure upon man's will and capacity to endure and Faulkner seems to realize that it is not only the men who have to somehow find the courage to endure, but also the women who are left behind. One of Faulkner's female characters is inclined to believe, as does Faulkner, that it is the women who are braver and who suffer more than even the men in times of war.

And Narcissa would sit...admiring more than ever that indomitable spirit that, born with a woman's body into a heritage of rash and heedless men and seemingly for the sole purpose of cherishing those men to their early and violent ends, and this over a period of history which had seen brothers and husband slain in the same useless mischancing of human affairs; had seen, as in a nightmare not to be healed by either waking or sleep, the foundations of her life swept away and had her roots torn bodily from that soil where her forefathers slept trusting in the integrity of mankind---a period at which the men themselves, for all their headlong and scornful rashness, would have quailed had their parts been passive parts and their doom been waiting. And she thought how much finer that gallantry which never lowered blade to foe no sword could find; that uncomplaining steadfastness of those

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Adams, "Faulkner and the Myth of the South," Mississippi Quarterly, XIV (Summer, 1961), p. 132.

unsung (ay, unwept too) women than the  
fustian and useless glamour of the men  
that obscured it.<sup>1</sup>

Let us now take a closer look at those undaunted matriarchs who kept the old plantation going, those sisters and wives and Negroes who have been left behind, and who compose a portion of the group labelled "The Unvanquished."<sup>2</sup> As a rule, they are strong, courageous, practical, indomitable, and free from sexual distraction.

It is appropriate to begin any discussion of Faulkner's characters with those who appear in Sartoris, for it is a key volume in his work and the one which sets the pattern for them all. It introduces the two great families, the Sartorises and the Snopeses, who figure directly or indirectly throughout the cycle of his novels. It also describes the town of Jefferson which is the center of Faulkner's fiction. In answer to a question concerning the order in which his books should be read, Faulkner replied, "...begin with a book called Sartoris. That has the germ of my apocrypha in it. A lot of the characters are postulated in that book..."<sup>3</sup>

The family with which Sartoris is primarily concerned is the Sartoris family whose members are Colonel Sartoris, Civil War leader and founder of the Sartoris clan; Aunt Jenny, the erect and indomi-

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, Sartoris, (New York: New American Library, 1929), pp. 285-286. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>This label corresponds to the title of one of Faulkner's novels, which focuses on the "unvanquished" women who fought at home.

<sup>3</sup>Lawrance Thompson, William Faulkner: An Introduction and Interpretation, 2nd edition, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), p. 181, Appendix.

table matriarch, also sister of Colonel Sartoris; old Bayard, son of the Colonel and president of the Jefferson bank; and young Bayard, old Bayard's grandson and twentieth century heir. Though young Bayard is Faulkner's major concern in the novel, Faulkner seems equally as concerned with dramatizing the lives of the women who surround him and with presenting his own concept of man and woman. In commenting upon at least one of Faulkner's focal points of interest, Cleanth Brooks states:

Except for Sanctuary, no Faulkner novel brings the war between the sexes more clearly into the open or stresses more sharply what Faulkner conceives of as basically different attitudes of men and women. As elsewhere in Faulkner, the men are romantic, obsessed with their foolish codes, quixotic schemes, and violent follies. It is the women who are practical, concerned with the concrete actualities and committed undeviatingly to first principles, though the women in Sartoris vary greatly...<sup>1</sup>

It is apparent, then, especially in Sartoris, that there is a distinct difference between Faulkner's concept of man and his concept of woman. Despite all the negative comments made about Faulkner's treatment of women, many critics are forced to admit that Faulkner's women generally possess some positive qualities. According to Faulkner, women seem to possess a wisdom, a kind of instinctive knowledge of reality which men must win by effort. This intuition and inner strength Faulkner tends to regard as the natural gift of women and one that can never be a natural attribute of men.<sup>2</sup> Generally, it is his Negroes and older women who are the elements of endurance and

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 381.



stability in Faulkner's novels. As Karl Zink points out, Negroes, women, and children often possess a "spiritual equilibrium which his major male heroes often lack."<sup>1</sup>

Aunt Jenny, Colonel Sartoris' younger sister and Bayard's aunt, is the perfect example of all which Faulkner finds admirable in women. She represents the genuine ideal of high-minded purity characteristic of the Southern lady.<sup>2</sup> She is the archetypal matriarch, being in the stage between "lady" and "ghost." Speaking in general about Faulkner's matriarchs, David Miller states:

For some there was a stage between lady and ghost. Once the earthmother had completed her destiny, hidden behind an occasional day of being indisposed, hushed visits from the doctor, and the knowing winks of the menfolk, the woman could sometimes pass uneventful into the position of matriarch. The strength gained in years of suffering and the habitual obedience of husband and child give these women great, almost tyrannical power...Against a matriarch such as Aunt Jenny, even Colonel Sartoris...seems powerless... the deistic quality of the matriarch is far removed from the Dionysic qualities worshipped in Eula Varner...As is the case with most of Faulkner's characters, the strength of the matriarch seems most often to work to the disadvantage of herself and her subjects, or at best to be a futile effort against overwhelming odds. But however unsuccessful her attempts to guide her perverse, moronic, psychotic, or childish "family," there is magnificence in the efforts of Dilsey, Addie, and Grandmother Millard.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Karl E. Zink, "Faulkner's Garden: Woman and the Immemorial Earth," Modern Fiction Studies, II (Autumn, 1956), p. 144.

<sup>2</sup>Kerr, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 14.

<sup>3</sup>Miller, Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, 7-8.

In 1869, Aunt Jenny, the 'magnificent' matriarch of Sartoris, made her way from Carolina to Jefferson, Mississippi, after her husband of only a few weeks had been killed in the War. She brought with her only her clothing and the stained glass that was John Sartoris' inheritance from his mother. Her preservation of the glass symbolizes her indomitable will and her preservation of what was fragile and precious in the Sartoris heritage. In fact, she is the one who has kept the Sartoris past alive over the generations. When we first see Virginia Du Pre Sartoris, it is her indomitable nature which impresses us first.

This was Virginia Du Pre, who came to them two years a wife and seven years a widow at thirty--- a slender woman with a delicate replica of the Sartoris nose and that expression of indomitable and utter weariness which all Southern women had learned to wear, bringing with her the clothing in which she stood and a wicker hamper filled with colored glass.<sup>1</sup>

Aunt Jenny, unlike other characters in the novel, shows no traces of the deep-seated malaise which paralyzes others. She is not at odds with herself and is clearly at home in her world.<sup>2</sup> She constantly holds in contempt the wild follies of the Sartoris clan, but it is obvious that at the same time she loves them. For example, she enjoys telling the story of her brother's exploits in the War. In Chapter I, a yardstick for evaluating analogous actions of the twin brothers, Young Bayard (home from World War I), and John (killed

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<sup>1</sup>Sartoris, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 109.

in the war) is implied by introducing that earlier pair of brothers, also named John and Bayard. Of that earlier pair, John is the great-grandfather of the twins, and Bayard is the dare-devil whose raid behind Federal lines resulted in his death. The story of that raid is repeatedly told by Aunt Jenny, the widowed sister of those earlier daredevils and the aunt of the younger twins. If she can be accused of anything, it is her romantically idealizing, glorifying and glamorizing the tales of generations past and present in their family history. Notice Faulkner's ironic comment concerning Aunt Jenny's converting sometimes dark events into glamorous legend.

It was she who told them of the manner of Bayard Sartoris' death prior to the second battle of Manassas. She had told the story many times since (at eighty she still told it, on occasions usually inopportune) and as he grew older the tale itself grew richer and richer, taking on a mellow splendor like wine; until what had been a hare-brained prank of two heedless and reckless boys wild with their own youth had become a gallant and finely tragical focal point to which the history of the race had been raised from out the old miasmic swamps of spiritual sloth by two angels valiantly fallen and strayed, altering the course of human events and purging the souls of men.  
(p. 25)

In an almost sarcastic manner, Faulkner is here pointing up the discrepancy on Miss Jenny's part between the facts and the myth romantically made out of the facts.

More often, however, she, being a true woman, cannot help seeing through the folly of her family's quixotic conduct. Occasionally she serves as commentator on the "heritage of humorless and fustian vainglory" (p. 374), as she deflates the Sartoris war

legends. Commenting to Narcissa upon John's irrational conduct at war, she says:

"Fiddlesticks,"..."The war just gave John a good excuse to get himself killed. If it hadn't been that, it would have been some other way that would have been a bother to everybody around."

"Miss Jenny!"

"I know, my dear. I've lived with these bullheaded Sartorises for eighty years, and I'll never give a single ghost of 'em the satisfaction of shedding a tear over him..." (pp. 42-43)

Aunt Jenny, having outlived all the male Sartorises with the exception of old and young Bayard, rules the household and everyone in it. All obey her without question. Commenting upon her ability to command everyone's attention, the narrator says:

...Hers was a forceful clarity and a colorful simplicity and a bold use of metaphor that Demosthenes would have envied and which even mules comprehended and of whose intent the most obtuse persons remained not long in doubt... (p. 47)

Not only has she taken complete charge of old Bayard's life, but, when young Bayard returns home from the war, she begins to take him under her wing.

"...You come on and eat your supper," she said briskly and firmly, entering his life again without a by-your-leave, taking up the snarled threads of it after her brisk and capable fashion, and he rose obediently.

"What's that?" old Bayard repeated.

"And you come on in, too." Miss Jenny swept him also into the orbit of her will as you gather a garment from a chair in passing. "Time you were in bed..." (p. 53)

Always mindful of the foolishness of all men and especially the Sartoris men, she is sometimes merciless in her criticism of

the male sex. Her opinion is that it is the women who are the stabilizing forces in society.

"...Men can't stand anything...Can't even stand helling around with no worry and no responsibility and no limit to all the meanness they can think about wanting to do. Do you think a man could sit day after day and month after month in a house miles from nowhere and spend the time between casualty lists tearing up bed clothes and window curtains and table linen to make lint, and watching sugar and flour and meat dwindling away,...and hiding in nigger cabins while drunken Yankee generals set fire to the house your great-great-grand-father built and you and all your folks were born in? Don't talk to me about men suffering in war." Miss Jenny snipped larkspur savagely...(p. 58)

When Narcissa asked her for advice about marriage, she answered:

"I wouldn't advise anybody to marry. You won't be happy but then, women haven't got civilized enough yet to be happy unmarried, so you might as well try it. We can stand anything, anyhow..." (p. 212)

When Narcissa and young Bayard finally marry, though Aunt Jenny makes no comment, one can infer what thoughts are going on within her. Sensing Narcissa's subsequent unhappiness and realization that Bayard "doesn't love anybody," not even their newborn baby (p. 241), Aunt Jenny asks her if she would do it again? Completely hopeless, Narcissa answers: "Don't you know I would?" (p. 241) And then comes the revealing comment about hers and Aunt Jenny's position as a result of their being a part of the seemingly doomed Sartoris family: "Again there was silence between them, in which without words they sealed their hopeless pact with that fine and passive courage of women" (p. 241).

Even as Aunt Jenny grows old, her spirit does not falter nor does she lose her capacity for endurance. By the end of the novel old Bayard has been killed in a car accident with young Bayard, as she had been warned, and young Bayard, after deserting them all, has died in a plane accident. Though tired, she remains "indomitable" and in control of the household. It is Narcissa who first notices that old age has had its effects on Aunt Jenny but has not conquered her.

...with a sort of shock she knew that Miss Jenny was getting old, that at last even her indomitable old heart was growing a little tired. It was a shock; for she had never associated senility with Miss Jenny, who was so spare and erect and brusque and uncompromising and kind, looking after the place which was not hers and to which she had been transplanted when her own alien roots in a far-away place, where customs and manners and even the very climate itself were different, had been severed violently; running it with tireless efficiency and with the assistance of only a doddering old Negro as irresponsible as a child.

But run the place she did, just as though old Bayard and young Bayard were there...(p. 285)

When Aunt Jenny had begun to read of young Bayard's death in the newspaper, she characteristically says---in a tone of resignation and with that realistic approach to life and its tragedies---

"...I don't have to read it,"...They never get into the papers but one way. And I know that he was somewhere he had no business being, doing something that wasn't any affair of his." ..."Well," she said. Then: "Thank God that's the last one. For a while, anyway. Home, Simon." (p. 294)

At the end of the novel, she is surveying the family's burial grounds and is overcome with disgust over the doings of men:

Miss Jenny stood for a time, musing, a slender, erect figure in black silk and a small uncompromising black bonnet...Well, it was the last one, at last, gathered in solemn conclave about the dying reverberation of their arrogant lusts, their dust moldering quietly beneath the pagan symbols of their vainglory and the carven gestures of it in enduring stone; and she remembered something Narcissa had said once, about a world without men, and wondered if therein lay peaceful avenues and dwellings thatched with quiet; and she didn't know. (p. 300)

Faulkner's concern with the Sartoris family continued in The Unvanquished. Though this novel was published five years after the publication of Sartoris, it tells of the events which happened prior to the action of Sartoris. Moreover, two of the characters who appear in The Unvanquished are major concerns of Sartoris: Bayard Sartoris and Miss Jenny Du Pre. When The Unvanquished opens the "old Bayard" of Sartoris is only twenty-four years old, and old Bayard's Aunt Jenny is a young woman. Though she is not as domineering and is not the old matriarch set in her ways, as she was in Sartoris, it is possible to recognize in this maternal, sensible, and calm young widow some of the same qualities which were more apparent in her as an older woman. The significance of women is also obvious in this novel and three of them are very important--Drusilla Hawk, Miss Rosa Millard, and Miss Jenny---for they shed further light on Faulkner's conception of the matriarch or the woman who assumes a man's role primarily because of the war.

Though The Unvanquished is the story of Bayard's development from a child into an adult, the heroine is Miss Rosa Millard, Colonel

Sartoris' mother-in-law, and the woman who never surrenders, even in the face of almost overwhelming odds. Typical of those who undergird and sustain the traditional society revealed in Faulkner's novels, she dominates Bayard and mediates his morality to him, much in the same manner as Aunt Jenny did when he was older.<sup>1</sup> During the Civil War it is she who manages to keep the household from falling apart. Although Colonel Sartoris singlehandedly captures a Yankee company, "Granny" Millard outsmarts the entire Yankee army in Mississippi. Though the Yankees take a chest of silver and a pair of mules from her, she establishes a thriving mule business wherein she sells and resells to the Yankees hundreds of mules she has gotten from them on forged orders. A woman of integrity, she imposes upon herself the same rigorous standards of honesty that she demands from her grandson, Bayard; she washes out her own mouth with soap when she has told a lie to the invading Yankee soldiers about the whereabouts of the rest of the family, even though it saves the lives of Bayard and Ringo whom she has hidden under her dress. She carries on the business of the plantation as long as the house remains; after the house is burned, she maneuvers---very cleverly---herself and the boys safely into Tennessee.

Taking advantage at every turn of the Yankee army, from whom she has recaptured her stolen merchandise, she uses forgery to secure more mules and aids other destitute farmers, as well as providing Colonel Sartoris with a basis for restoration when he returns from

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 94.



the war. She engages in this deception reluctantly and, after the Yankees discover her trickery and put her out of business, she enters the church to confess to God, mixing piety with shrewdness:

...I have sinned. I have stolen, and I have borne false witness against my neighbor, though that neighbor was an enemy of my people..."But I did not sin for gain or for greed,"..."I did not sin for revenge. I defy You or anyone to say I did. I sinned first for justice; I sinned for the sake of food and clothes for Your own creatures who could not help themselves---for children who had given their fathers, for wives who had given their sons to a holy cause, even though You have seen fit to make it a lost cause...And if this be sin in your sight, I take this on my conscience too. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

Amusingly, what began as a confession of sin becomes a challenge and reproof to God. Characteristically, her confession breathes more defiance and assurance than remorse or repentance. It is this stubbornness and strength of will---indomitability, Faulkner would say---that constitutes her chief appeal.<sup>2</sup> During the four years of war, "she hadn't got any older or weaker, but just littler and littler and straighter and straighter and more indomitable" (p. 163). Her pride and resistance and will and power to act are qualities which Faulkner apparently identifies with the old South. Honoring her as the strongest character in the novel, Faulkner probably arrived at the title of the book with her in mind. "It is Granny, rather than

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished*, (New York: New American Library, 1934), p. 115. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Melvin Backman, *Faulkner: The Major Years*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 117.

Colonel Sartoris, who is the true hero of The Unvanquished; it is feminine strength, rather than masculine power, that remains unvanquished."<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the novel, in the section entitled "An Odor of Verbena," we first see Miss Jenny, who has not come to live with the Sartorises until 1869. But, her presence in the novel is crucial, though brief. She serves as a foil to Drusilla Hawk, the young girl who rebels against the Southern ideal of womanhood and joins Colonel Sartoris' calvary, and we are forced to make comparisons between them. Like Drusilla, she has lost a young husband in the war, though, as Bayard observes, she differs from Drusilla in that she had at least been able to spend a few nights with him before he was killed. However, she is everything Drusilla is not and she is able to give Bayard precisely the sort of understanding he needs during the crisis which follows his father's death. If she lacks Miss Rosa Millard's obvious heroism, she still represents stability and sanity. She is not, like Miss Rosa, pulled out of her proper orbit by extraordinary circumstances, nor like Drusilla, embittered and unsexed. She continues, throughout all the novels in which she appears, to be the 'nurturing and sustaining force on which society rests."<sup>2</sup>

Another example of the woman who endures in the midst of war and chaos is Judith Sutpen of Absalom, Absalom! Like Drusilla

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<sup>1</sup>Backman, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>2</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 99.

and Aunt Jenny, she is left single when her lover, Charles Bon, is killed. Never idle, she keeps the plantation going with the aid of Clytie, her Negro half-sister, and helps to nurse the wounded in a near-by hospital. She is one of the few characters in the novel who is capable of morally significant action. Completely self-effacing, she goes about her duties without a complaint. Whenever she is described, emphasis is always placed on her "impenetrable, calm, and absolutely serene face."<sup>1</sup> Note her overwhelming strength of character in Mr. Compson's account of her life during the war:

"And Judith. She lived alone now...she lived in anything but solitude, what with Ellen [her mother] in bed in the shuttered room, requiring the unremitting attention of a child...and she (Judith) and Clytie making and keeping a kitchen garden of sorts to keep them alive;...When she came to town now, in the made-over dress which all Southern women now wore, in the carriage still but drawn now by a mule, a plow mule...to join the other women---there were wounded in Jefferson then---in the improvised hospital where (the nurtured virgin, the supremely and traditionally idle) they cleaned and dressed the self-fouled bodies of strange injured and dead and made lint of the window curtains and sheets and linen of the houses in which they had been born..." (pp. 124-126)

Though Judith is considerably younger, her actions outlined above are reminiscent of Aunt Jenny and Granny Millard.

It is apparent from the beginning of the novel that the "female principle to which Mr. Compson frequently refers, is a source of conflict for the male protagonist, Thomas Sutpen, as well as a significant force in the novel. What are the characteristics of this female principle which figures so prominently in Faulkner's novels?

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<sup>1</sup>Absalom, Absalom!, p. 128.

It is the "passive and indomitable life forces of nature."<sup>1</sup> Karl E. Zink points out in his excellent study of Faulkner's generic Woman that she is "akin to the 'fecund' earth, like the earth itself potential sources for renewal and development, for physical continuity within the continuous process of Nature."<sup>2</sup> Their ability to sustain life amid destruction and disintegration enables them to achieve what Rosa Coldfield in Absalom, Absalom! defines as "that doom which we call female victory which is: endure and endure, without rhyme or reason or hope of reward---and then endure" (p. 144). Judith also comments on this necessity for endurance:

"...You get born and you try this and you dont know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings...and all the others all trying and they dont know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom...and it cant matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying..." (p. 127)

The "indomitable female endurance" of Absalom, Absalom! is represented in Judith Sutpen. When Sutpen returns to his home from the war he finds it dominated by three women---Judith, Clytie, and Miss Rosa Coldfield, his late wife's sister, who has learned that they "did not need him, had not the need for any man" (p. 154). Judith, whom Cleanth Brooks refers to as "one of Faulkner's finest

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas M. Lorch, "Thomas Sutpen and the Female Principle," Mississippi Quarterly, XX (Winter, 1966-1967), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>Karl E. Zink, "Faulkner's Garden: Woman and the Immemorial Earth," Modern Fiction Studies, II (Autumn, 1956), p. 143.

characters of endurance,"<sup>1</sup> is perhaps the most admirable character in the book. As a little girl, she is stronger than her brother, Henry, who vomits at the sight of his father fighting one of his slaves while she watches calmly. Unlike her father, however, she is motivated by love and compassion, two of Faulkner's prime virtues. It is she who invites Charles Bon's octoroon mistress to visit his grave. It is she who, on his mother's death, sends to New Orleans for his son and tries to rear him. Some years later, it is conjectured that she also tries to free him by promising to take care of his Negro wife and child if he will go to the North to pass as white and find a better life. Later she takes him into the house when he is stricken with yellow fever and dies nursing him. Unlike her father, she always acknowledges openly the blood kinship which exists between her and the Negro children whom he fathers. Even though they have the "taint" of Negro blood, they are never turned away from her door. She grows up with Clytie in the same house and looks upon her as her sister, despite her Negro blood. Her actions are human actions, unlike those of her father, who never acknowledges his Negro son, Charles Bon, and who rejects his first wife when he finds that she has Negro blood. Her capacity for love and suffering far outweigh her father's supposed achievements.

Though Thomas Sutpen is the novel's primary interest and though the story of Judith is only obliquely dealt with, it is Judith's story which impresses us most. As Brooks states: "The

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 319.

story of Judith, though muted and played down in terms of the whole novel, is one of the most moving that Faulkner has ever written."<sup>1</sup>

He comments further on this amazing woman:

...She is the young woman who falls in love with a fascinating stranger, the friend of her brother, who means to marry him in spite of her father's silent opposition, and who matches her father's strength of will with a quiet strength of her own. She endures the horror of her fiance's murder and buries his body. She refuses to commit suicide; she keeps the place going for her father's return. Years later it is Judith who sees to it that Bon's mistress has an opportunity to visit his grave...Judith is doomed by misfortunes not of her making, but she is not warped and twisted by them. Her humanity survives them.<sup>2</sup>

Quentin's father, Mr. Compson, who is one of the narrators is perhaps the only character in the novel who is able to understand and appreciate Judith. When he tries to explain her actions, especially as they relate to Bon, he is forced to admit that she is always motivated by the "old virtues." Though she never understands what has transpired between her father and Bon (her half-brother, though she does not know it) on that Christmas before Bon leaves mysteriously, she waits for him without questioning for four years.

"...And Judith: how else to explain her but his way?...Have you noticed how so often when we try to reconstruct the causes which lead up to the actions of men and women, how with a sort of astonishment we find ourselves now and then reduced to the belief...that they stemmed from some of the old virtues? the thief who

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 319.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 319.

steals not for greed but for love, the murderer who kills not out of lust but pity? Judith, giving implicit love where she had derived breath and pride: that true pride, not that false kind which transforms what it does not at the moment understand into scorn and outrage and so vents itself in pique and lacerations, but true pride which can say to itself without abasement I love, I will accept no substitute; something has happened between him and my father; if my father was right, I will never see him again; if wrong he will come or send for me; if happy I can be I will, if suffer I must I can..." (pp. 120-121)

After telling his son about how Judith had somehow scraped up enough money to provide headstones for Charles Bon and his son after their deaths, Mr. Compson comments on the nature of women:

"...They lead beautiful lives---women: Lives not only divorced from, but irrevocably excommunicated from, all reality. That's why although their deaths, the instant of dissolution, are of no importance to them since they have a courage and fortitude in the face of pain and annihilation which would make the most spartan man resemble a puling boy, yet to them their funeral and graves, the little puny affirmations of spurious immortality set above their slumber are of incalculable importance..." (pp. 192-192)

Generally, it is Faulkner's older women and Negroes who represent a unifying and sustaining force in the disrupted Southern society of the Reconstruction era. The Sound and the Fury is the story of the decline of a Southern aristocratic family, The Compsons. Despite their economic misfortune and moral degeneration, however, there is one among them who is able to persevere and to maintain some bits of order and peace in the almost overwhelming chaos. Ironically enough, Dilsey, the Negro maid and cook, is the stabilizing force

and the backbone of the family. She cares for the family and keeps them from falling completely apart, through her firmness, stability, and faith. Though she is mindful of her position, she takes an active part in the lives of the Compsons and is always there to help when problems arise. She is not the condescending, passive, indifferent type as one might expect of an illiterate, limited Negro servant of her day. In a compassionate manner, she attends not only to the physical needs of the family, but to their emotional and psychological needs as well. Dilsey is truly the most praiseworthy character in the novel.

One cannot help but recall Dilsey when he reads Lillian Smith's description of the Negro matriarch, the "mammy", who was so intimate a part of the Southern white household:

It was customary in the South, if a family possessed a moderate income, to have a colored nurse for the children. Sometimes such a one came with the first child and lived in the family until the last one was grown. Her role in the family was involved and of tangled contradictions. She always knew her "place," but neither she nor her employers could have defined it. She was given a limited authority, but it was elastic enough to stretch into dictatorship over not only children but the white mother and sometimes even the male head of the family. They leaned on her strength because they had so little of their own or because she had so much, and once learning they could not free themselves from subjection. Many an old nurse, knowing all there was to know of her white folks, familiar with every bone of every skeleton in their closets, gradually became so dominating that her employers actually feared her power. Yet she was a necessary part of these big sprawling households. She was a nurse, witch doctor, and priest, conjuring off our warts, our stomachaches and fears, all of which disappeared when she said they would...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lillian Smith, Killers of the Dream, Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), pp. 110-111.



From the beginning of the novel we can see that Dilsey has an extremely important role in the decaying household of the Compsons. In the Benjy section there is evidence of her stamina and ability to see the truth in the family history, which continues throughout the story. She first appears shortly after Mr. Compson's funeral as Mrs. Compson and the idiot son, Benjy, are getting ready to visit the cemetery. She wonders aloud why Jason, now the head of the household, does not get a new surrey since "this thing going to fall to pieces under you all some day."<sup>1</sup> This seemingly insignificant comment reveals her sense of the deteriorating condition of the family. We also see throughout this first section that Dilsey understands Benjy and cares for him with affection. She is the exact opposite of Mrs. Compson, the mother, who cannot understand her son and is emotionally incapable of giving honest love to him because she is so self-centered. She feels that her idiot son is a personal judgment and a curse on her, and she can only pity him as she does herself. Dilsey, on the other hand, understands his needs and does all she can to satisfy them. When he appears upset in the carriage just before they leave for the cemetery, Dilsey tells the mother to "give him a flower to hold" because she knows this will comfort him. "That's what he wanting," she says (p. 10). Typically, the mother is only concerned with herself. "No, no... You'll get them all scattered" (p. 10). But Dilsey remedies the problem by taking the flower from Mrs. Compson's hand and giving

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, (New York: Random House, 1929), p. 9. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

it to Benjy herself. The mother does realize, however, her insufficiencies and the fact that she relies on Dilsey for everything. When Jason asks her what he should do about Uncle Maury's constant borrowing of their money, she says, "Why ask me," "I don't have any say so. I try not to worry you and Dilsey" (p. 12).

Dilsey is indeed the antithesis of Mrs. Compson in every way. Mrs. Compson has always been sick, useless, helpless, and dependent on Dilsey to manage the family's affairs. Cleanth Brooks would agree that Mrs. Compson is one of Faulkner's more despicable women characters and probably his most despicable "mother."

...The basic cause of the breakup of the Compson family---let the more general cause be what they may---is the cold and self-centered mother who is sensitive about the social status of her own family, the Bascombs, who feels the birth of an idiot son as a kind of personal affront, who spoils and corrupts her favorite son, and who withholds any real love and affection from her other children and her husband. Caroline Compson is not so much an actively wicked and evil person as a cold weight of negativity which paralyzes the normal family relationships. She is certainly at the root of Quentin's lack of confidence in himself and his inverted pride. She is at least the immediate cause of her husband's breakdown into alcoholic cynicism and doubtless she is ultimately responsible for Caddy's promiscuity...<sup>1</sup>

It is Dilsey, not the mother, who puts the children to bed. She is the one who tries to shield the children from all the misfortunes which take place. When a death occurs, she tries to get them away from the unpleasantness of the funeral. When Benjy reaches puberty it is Dilsey who must take the responsibility of telling him that

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 334.

he can no longer sleep with Caddy. The children always say they are going to tell Dilsey on each other, not the mother. When they get into mischief, it is she who must discipline them. Dilsey is quite aware, however, of the fact that she has, in effect, been the children's mother and has understood and cared for them as a mother should. The irony of the entire pathetic situation is that the deprived, illiterate Negro does in fact comprehend the world better than the others. Quentin, the brother, reflects on Negroes' ability to see and accept things in a quite different manner from whites:

"...They come into white people's lives like that in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope; the rest of the time just voices that laugh when you see nothing to laugh at, tears when no reason for tears..." (p. 211)

Dilsey emerges as an even stronger figure in the Jason section. When Quentin asks for another cup of coffee, in the beginning, Dilsey refuses to give it to her, "let lone whut Miss Cahline say" (p. 227). An argument follows between Quentin (Caddy's daughter) and her uncle, Jason, over her promiscuous behavior in general and specifically her playing hookey from school. Dilsey, as usual, intervenes and Jason slams the door in her face and insists on her keeping out of the room where he and Quentin are arguing. Dilsey, however, persists and enters the room; when he pulls off his belt to beat Quentin, Dilsey grabs his arm and he flings her away and causes her to stumble. Even after she has gotten older and lost some of her strength, she still tries to protect the Compson children. Even though "she couldn't

do any more than move hardly," she risks her safety and bravely dares Jason to strike her instead of Quentin (p. 229). Her persistence and fearlessness in the presence of Jason intensify the reader's sense of her enduring nature. Even in the midst of trouble and potential disaster, she keeps her head and restores peace. Jason later makes a sarcastic but ironic remark to his mother about Dilsey. "...That's the trouble with nigger servants, when they've been with you for a long time they get so full of self-importance that they're not worth a dam. Think they run the whole family" (p. 257). Dilsey has in fact run the family but not because of her feelings of self-importance; there has been no one else with the stability and understanding necessary to run the family but her.

By the time we come to the final section of the book we are quite prepared for Dilsey to be the center around which the final state of the Compsons is depicted. Dilsey is the most noble and admirable character that we have encountered and we sense this even more in this section. Her physical condition is deteriorated:

...She had been a big woman once but now her skeleton rose...as though muscle and tissue had been courage or fortitude which the days or the years had consumed until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the somnolent and impervious guts, and above that the collapsed face that gave the impression of the bones themselves being outside the flesh... (p. 331)

As the story proceeds, however, it is apparent that Dilsey has remained steadfast and faithful, has retained "courage" and "fortitude," and has "endured" (Appendix, p. 427), in spite of the decay of

everything around her. Just as always, Mrs. Compson is completely dependent on her. "...She stood at the head of the back stairway, calling '"Dilsey"' at steady and inflectionless intervals" (p. 333). Just as Mrs. Compson calls her name 'with machine-like regularity' (p. 337), she relies on her to keep the household functioning, and Dilsey goes about her work just as efficiently as ever. Later, when Jason tells his mother sarcastically that she's 'got a prize set of servants' (p. 347), Mrs. Compson admits her utter helplessness. 'I have to humour them. I have to depend on them so completely. It's not as if I were strong. I wish I were' (p. 347).

Dilsey's religious experience allows her to transcend the suffering and problems of her world in a manner which the Compsons are never able to achieve. She is really sincere in her belief and faith in God. Throughout the preacher's sermon near the end of the novel, she quietly but openly cries. It is quite evident that she understands the relevance of the sermon on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ to her own life. She later says, "I've seen de first en de last...I seed de beginning, en now I sees de endin'" (p. 371). Dilsey means that she has seen the beginning of the Compson family when they were prosperous, proud, and respectable. She has also seen the end---their deterioration and what is left of their heritage. All that is left of this once aristocratic family is "an ancient white horse in a battered and lopsided surrey" (p. 397), the "solemn and profound" clock which "might have been the dry pulse of the decaying house itself" (p. 355), a shabby garden

and broken fence" (p. 360), an empty, hypochondriac mother, a ruthless son who is the reverse of the values and ideals which the family once held, and an idiot son who constantly wails "in his hoarse hopeless voice" (p. 394). And, there is Dilsey. Like Aunt Jenny, Granny Millard, and Judith, she proves that it is possible for man to endure. They remain "unvanquished" until the end.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE "GHOSTS"

David Miller has placed Faulkner's women into one of two categories: "earthmothers or ghosts."<sup>1</sup> The last of these two categories, he says, is comprised of women who are either sexless or whose sex is ignored. Miller goes on to point out that "as ghosts these women do not have the rich-rotten fertility of the earth-mother."<sup>2</sup> He adds, however, that "none of Faulkner's women are born ghosts; it takes much trouble to produce a de-sexed female, nor does it happen without a struggle from the would-be earth-mother."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, "each of the ghosts"<sup>4</sup> has either been or tried to be, if not an earthmother, at least a lady: femaleness is the

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<sup>1</sup>Miller, Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>A partial list of the women whom Miller has classified as "ghosts" includes: Emily Grierson ("A Rose for Emily"), Aunt Jenny (Sartoris), Narcissa Benbow (Sartoris), Judith Sutpen (Absalom, Absalom!), Drusilla Hawk (The Unvanquished), Joanna Burden (Light in August), and Miss Rosa (Absalom, Absalom!). I do not agree with all of his choices and have therefore included a few of the above-mentioned females in other groups, while realizing, at the same time, that some of Faulkner's women do possess those qualities which would indeed cause them to be placed in groups other than the ones to which they have been assigned by me. This would suggest the difficulty and sometimes inconvenience of attempting to group an author's characters.

universal heritage, although not the universal possession of all women" (p. 6). Lillian Smith, author of Killers of the Dream, attempts to delineate the segregated culture of the Deep South on the basis of her personal experiences as a Southerner, and describes in a similar manner "the little ghost women of small Southern towns" (p. 121):

The majority of Southern women convinced themselves that God had ordained that they be deprived of pleasure and meekly stuffed their hollowness with piety, trying to believe the tightness they felt was hunger satisfied. Culturally stunted by a region that still pays nice rewards to simple-mindedness in females, they had no defense against blandishment. They listened to the round words of men's tribute to Sacred Womanhood and believed, thinking no doubt that if they were not sacred then what under God's heaven was the matter with them! Once hoisted up by the old colonels' oratory, they stayed on lonely pedestals and rigidly played "statue" while their men went about more important affairs elsewhere...Sex was pushed out through the back door as a shameful thing never to be mentioned...<sup>1</sup>

Though Miller fails to mention it, the fact that there were "ghosts" at all in Southern society can be partially attributed to existing puritanical moral codes governing the behavior of Southern white "ladies," and prevailing Calvinistic attitudes toward sins of the flesh (at least where women are concerned), as Lillian Smith seems to suggest above. Both of these factors contributed to the elevation of white gentlewomen to a supposedly sexless plane and consequently relegated her to the role of "ghost." These

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, op. cit., pp. 122-123.



unnatural codes of conduct were designed to preserve virtue, or at least the appearance of virtue; even after marriage, ironically enough, the women were to remain "pure" and "ghost-like." Faulkner's ghosts, often spinisters but sometimes wives, become so, he seems to imply, not because they desire this condition, but because their background has forced them into it. Moreover, if one looks closely enough, he is liable to find beneath their ghostly facades a real woman desiring the same kind of life which normal women lead.

One of Faulkner's most complete portraits of the "pure" young girl, who beneath the surface is a skillful hypocrite, is Narcissa Benbow, whose story runs through Sartoris, Sanctuary, and "There Was a Queen." In Sartoris she is the typical Southern belle and plays up to her brother Horace's idealization of her by dressing in white and creating an impression of "constant serenity" (p. 149). In calling his sister an "unravished bride of quietness" (pp. 154 and 165), Horace speaks more accurately than he could have known; for there is indeed something eternally, though depravedly, virginal about her. One of the earlier descriptions of her underscores her fleshless, statue-like qualities:

...just beyond it a girl with a constant  
epicene unrepose, a dynamic fixation like  
that of a carven sexless figure caught in  
moments of action... (p. 60)

She is terribly afraid of all men except her brother for whom she seems to have incestuous feelings. What seems early in the novel to be simple shyness and little-girl bashfulness turns out

to be a deep-rooted frigidity and an inability to cope with men. Though she is frequently in the company of Bayard Sartoris, who is obviously trying to seduce her, she always manages to keep her distance from him. Even when he is sick in bed, she is hesitant about getting too close to him. When he asks her to come closer to his bed, she gets nervous and threatens to leave, to which he disgustingly replies: "...I want you to be human for one time and talk to me. Come over here...Why are you afraid of a man flat on his back, in a damn cast-iron strait-jacket anyway?" (p. 200) After such incidents as these, Narcissa can only wish that she were free of all men:

"...I hate Bayard Sartoris," she said with sudden vehemence; "I hate all men..." she sat also without life...thinking that there would be peace for her only in a world where there were no men at all...(pp. 144 and 201)

Utterly helpless after similar ordeals with Bayard and especially when he tries to touch her, she can only weep with "hopeless and dreadful hysteria" (p. 207). She insists that she will never marry, that "men...that was where unhappiness lay, getting men into your life" (p. 212). The marriage between her and Bayard finally takes place, however; but just why they marry is not explained. Though she becomes a mother, however, she never becomes a wife, because she is completely void of passion and lacks understanding of the nature of men.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the novel we find her even more determined in her war against men, marshaling all her forces to protect her

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 108.

child from ever becoming what his father had been. Still naive, she thinks she can prevent a similar fate from befalling her son as had befallen the other Sartoris men by simply not naming him after a Sartoris. "He isn't John. He's Benbow Sartoris," she tells Aunt Jenny when Aunt Jenny mistakenly refers to the new born baby as John (p. 302). Jenny quickly responds, pointing up Narcissa's naivete, "Do you think you can change one of 'em with a name?'... "Do you think...that because his name is Benbow, he'll be any less a Sartoris and a scoundrel and a fool?" (p. 303)

One of the most revealing things about Narcissa is her attitude toward the anonymous love letters that are being sent to her by the bank clerk, Byron Snopes. She has no idea who is writing these passionate, illiterate, and obscene letters, but it is apparent that she is deriving some sort of satisfaction from them. She shows one of them to Aunt Jenny, with the explanation that showing it to someone else will perhaps make her feel less filthy. Miss Jenny wonders why she should feel filthy at all, since she has not invited the letters. Although Aunt Jenny advises her to destroy them or to turn them over to a man in the family who could perhaps find the sender, Narcissa chooses---rather perversely---to keep the letters, which she stores neatly in a bundle in her bedroom chest. The day before her wedding, Narcissa discovers that the love notes have been stolen and a new one left in their place. In "There Was a Queen," Narcissa is finally revealed as a hypocrite. The story of the Snopes' letters is completed. A government agent, trying to trace Byron Snopes turns up with the letters, found after Byron apparently misplaced them when

leaving with funds from the bank. Learning that the Federal agent has not shown the letters to anyone else, Narcissa buys them by yielding her body to him for a night during a week-end in Memphis. On her return she sits with her young son in the creek, with their clothes on, in a kind of purification ritual. As she reveals in her confession to Aunt Jenny, Narcissa knew that in keeping the letters she was not acting like a lady, and she does not deny that she kept the letters for the satisfaction of rereading them. Just before Narcissa's confession there is further evidence that she is not a true lady; Elnora, the Negro servant, tells her children how Narcissa had worked for five years to get herself married to Bayard. Cleanth Brooks comments on the end of the story:

...Respectability triumphs over virtue. Better to be for once the kind of person the letters beseech her to be rather than remain innocent and virtuous with the possibility that other men may read the letters and think she is not virtuous. When Miss Jenny learns how Narcissa got the letters back, it is the end of Miss Jenny: she is found a little later sitting up straight like the patrician that she is, dead in her chair---and high time, when women who bear the name of the family are so anxious to be known as ladies that they will prostitute themselves for the name's sake...<sup>1</sup>

In Sanctuary, Narcissa is a widow living at Sartoris with Aunt Jenny and little Benbow. She is still a ghost, though a more dangerous one.

...She had crossed the parlor door...with that serene and stupid impregnability of heroic

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 109.

statuary; she was in white...She had never been given to talking, living a life of serene vegetation like perpetual corn or wheat in a sheltered garden instead of a field...<sup>1</sup>

Here in the conflict between Narcissa and Horace her "serenity is revealed as imperviousness, her purity as self-righteousness and coldness, her ethical principles as a willingness to sacrifice everything, even the life of a man, to preserve the family name and keep it untarnished."<sup>2</sup> Here again Narcissa is revealed as the victim of a tradition which places too much emphasis on appearances. Commenting in an amusing manner upon Narcissa's inability to accept anything which she considers to be not above-board, Aunt Jenny says to Horace, "Do you think Narcissa'd want anybody to know that any of her folks could know people that would do anything as natural as make love, or rob or steal?" (p. 115) He replies that he had counted on her imperviousness" since she has had it thirty-six years. Narcissa opposes Horace in his effort to prove the innocence of Lee Goodwin, accused of murder, and in his compassionate concern for Lee's wife, Ruby. She is extremely upset that Horace would lower himself by involving himself, as well as the family, in the affairs of such lower class people as the Goodwins, and midway through the novel Horace is forced to realize that it is his own sister who has stirred up the ladies of the town to see that Ruby is evicted from the cheap room in which he has found lodgings for her.

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, Sanctuary, (New York: Random House, 1931), pp. 102-103.

<sup>2</sup>Kerr, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 7.

A little later, Narcissa asks Horace about the district attorney; and, as she urges Horace to disassociate himself from the murder case, it becomes perfectly plain to him how shallow and cruel Narcissa actually is. She gives the district attorney information which leads him to Temple and ultimately defeats Horace's attempt to get her to tell the truth. Narcissa has no concern whatsoever for Goodwin, who is innocent, nor for his wife. All she wants is that her brother get out of the case so that their precious name will escape blemish. Speaking to the district attorney, to whom she divulges secrets about how Horace plans to proceed with his defense, she says:

"So the quicker he loses, the better it would be, wouldn't it?"..."If they hung the man and got it over with"...She said, her tone cold and level: "I have reasons for wanting Horace out of this case. The sooner the better..." (pp. 256-257)

Next to Popeye, Narcissa is the most frightening person in this novel, as she pitilessly moves on to her own ends with no regard for justice, for other people, or for the discovery of truth. With regard to the murder, she exclaims to Horace:

Dont you see, this is my home, where I must spend the rest of my life...I dont care where else you go nor what you do. I dont care how many women you have nor who they are. But I cannot have my brother mixed up with a woman people are talking about...I dont think anything about it. I dont care. That's what people in town think. So it doesn't matter whether it's true or not...I dont see that it makes any difference who did it. The question is, are you going to stay mixed up with it? When people already believe you and she are slipping into my house at night... (pp. 178-179)

Characteristically, it is "the people" that Narcissa is most concerned about and then herself, but never Goodwin who may be sentenced or even killed for a murder he did not commit.

Thus, the most complete example of the typical pure Southern woman proves to be the most lacking in real virtue and in purity of mind and action.<sup>1</sup> Narcissa is motivated entirely by self-interest and her attempts to always keep the appearances of a respectable Southern lady, her attempts to remain free of strong emotion and somehow aloof from the sordid, but nevertheless real life of the Goodwins are responsible for her corruption and lack of decency.

David Miller insists that of the numerous ghosts about whom Faulkner writes, Rosa Coldfield of Absalom, Absalom! is the most tragic.<sup>2</sup> She has been "ephemerized before she had a chance to become a woman, changed by the war to a ghost before the South could make her a lady."<sup>3</sup> Miss Rosa is one of the narrators of Absalom, Absalom! who is attempting to re-tell and interpret the Sutpen legend. Faulkner filters the same characters---primarily Thomas Sutpen and all of those with whom he came in contact---through the personalities of his narrators so that the reader can see how they interpret matters in terms of their own experience. Just as an artist reveals himself through his creations, Faulkner's narrators reveal themselves through their narrations. Their stories and interpretations

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<sup>1</sup>Kerr, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 7.

<sup>2</sup>Miller, Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

of what happened to Thomas Sutpen and his family are largely the result of their own needs, preoccupations, and obsessions; so that one can never really know exactly what took place prior to the telling of the story. There is no such thing, then, according to Faulkner, as an objective presentation of the Sutpen story, nor is this ultimately what is important. At best, we gain insight into the personalities of the narrators, and a limited knowledge of the people whose motives they try to analyze and understand.

Chapter I is Miss Rosa's narration. She lives in the past and in the cherishing of her hatred of Sutpen and her frustration. She has been wearing black for forty-three years and has shut herself up in the "dim coffin-smelling gloom" of an unventilated and dark room; she exudes "the rank smell of female old flesh embattled in virginity."<sup>1</sup> In fact she has remained rigid with horror and hate for many years; we learn what the source of this hate is much later. Miss Rosa Coldfield had been a child when her older sister was married to Sutpen, thus making her a member of the Sutpen family. After the death of her sister and after the War, she is courted by Sutpen and promised marriage, if they bred together and if she bore him a son. She, of course, rejects this proposal as an insult and grows to hate Sutpen. For her he became the incarnation of evil, satanic, and a demon. She hates him chiefly because he destroys for her that social eminence, respectability, and security which she so desperately wants. Because of him, she must

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<sup>1</sup>Absalom, Absalom!, p. 8.



remain a virgin, an old maid, and a lonely woman for the rest of her life. Her accounts of the Sutpen story reflect her intense hatred of Sutpen and her warped personality.

Faulkner seems to suggest that Miss Rosa is a victim of the cruel ironies of history, her upbringing, and of a tradition of puritanic ideals which deprive a woman of that which is necessary for complete development. Her unhappy childhood can be attributed to her being born to older parents and to the fact that she never had a chance to be young. Also, she is born at the price of her mother's life and she is never permitted to forget it. She is raised by the same spinster aunt who had forced her older sister into marriage, "growing up in that closed masonry of females to see in the fact of her own breathing not only the lone justification for the sacrifice of her mother's life, not only a living reproach to her father, but a breathing indictment...of the entire male principle (that principle which had left the aunt a virgin at 35)" (pp. 59-60). And so, Miss Rosa is forced to grow up in a stifling atmosphere with only a father, whom she secretly hates, and a spinster aunt. "In a grim mausoleum air of Puritan righteousness and outraged female vindictiveness Miss Rosa's childhood was passed" (p. 60).

After her father's death (during the War), she goes out to Sutpen's Hundred to live since she, a pauper, has no one but Judith, her niece, to whom she can turn. Failing to find love and marriage, she finds satisfaction by "projecting upon Judith all the abortive dreams and delusions of her own doomed and frustrated youth" (p. 71). She takes vicarious satisfaction in the preparations for Judith's

marriage, offering her the only gift in her power: "She offered to teach Judith how to keep house and plan meals and count laundry" (p. 71).

Miss Rosa is the tragic and ironical symbol of chaste womanhood.<sup>1</sup> While she is indeed "pure," her life has lacked everything which makes life meaningful and significant. Never having experienced true happiness and love and fulfillment, she, like a ghost, lives in an unreal world which lacks clear outlines and substance. She compares her life to the prenatal existence of a baby when he is unaware of all things and really not living":

"...turned twenty true enough yet still a child, still living in that womb-like corridor where the world came not even as living echo but as dead incomprehensible shadow..." (p. 162)

"...This was the miscast of my barren youth which I lived out not as a woman, a girl, but rather as the man which I perhaps had been. I was fourteen then, fourteen in years if they could have been called years while in that unpaced corridor which I called childhood, which was not living but rather some projection of the lightless womb itself; I gestate and complete, not aged, just overdue because of some caesarean lack, some cold-nuzzling forceps of the savage time which should have torn me free...(p. 144)

Like an aborted fetus, she is never given a chance to breathe and really live.

She, "the spinster doomed for life at sixteen" (p. 75), can only experience love and life through her imagined partaking of the raptures of Judith and her lover, Charles Bon. When Judith's mother announces

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<sup>1</sup>Kerr, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 8.

their approaching marriage, Miss Rosa responds: "We deserve him" (p. 76). She begins secretly making garments for Judith's trousseau "which were to be for her own vicarious bridal" (p. 77). Though she is herself secretly in love with Bon, she insists that she knows nothing of love, especially romantic love:

"...I do not love him; how could I. I had not even heard his voice...because I who had learned nothing of love, not even parents' love...became not mistress, not beloved, but more than even love; I became all polymath love's androgynous advocate... I did not love him...And even if I did, not as women love...If it was love it was the way that mothers love...But not as women love. Because I asked nothing of him. And more than that: I gave him nothing, which is the sum of loving..." (pp. 146-147)

A life of virginity, penury, bitterness, frustration, and hate is Miss Rosa's reward for living up to her puritanic ideals.

Joanna Burden of Light in August shows another side---but more perverse---of the desperation and depravity which loneliness and spinsterhood fosters. Through her, Faulkner shows that it was not only the Southern ladies who became "ghosts" nor was it just the Civil War that brought about that change.<sup>1</sup> Miller goes on to describe this "part-time" ghost.

...Continued rejection as a "nigger-lovin" Yankee, coupled with a peculiar version of the white-man's-burden, did it to that part-time ghost, Joanna Burden. It is significant that until Joanna attracted Joe, she remained the ghost which her silent sufferings had produced---withdrawn, detached, calm, and without sex...<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Miller, Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, 6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Maxwell Geismar protests that Faulkner has made "this decent and well-meaning abolitionist spinster"<sup>1</sup> the special object of his venom. He further accuses Faulkner of hating her because she is a Northern woman and of subjecting her to humiliations which he spares the Southern women in his novels. This comment is obviously unfounded. Joanna is one of Faulkner's masculinized women, but he is no harder upon Joanna than he is on his other masculinized women including Drusilla Hawk, the Southern girl who rode with a Confederate troop of calvary, and Miss Emily Grierson, a Southern woman who, after years of spinsterhood, acquires a lover and kills him after he threatens to leave; moreover, she sleeps with his dead body until she dies, years later. It is inaccurate to say that Faulkner is unduly hard on either of them; he thinks, rather, that life has been hard on them.<sup>2</sup>

When we first see Joanna Burden, she is a forty-two year old virgin, living the life of a recluse in a huge house completely isolated from the rest of the community. Her family had come from the North and had settled in Jefferson to help Negroes, but had met opposition and finally her grandfather and half-brother were killed by Colonel Sartoris. She has remained in the house alone all these years and has been completely shunned and ignored by the whites because of her associations with the Negroes of the community. Taught by her father that her mission in life is to carry the burden of the black race,

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<sup>1</sup>Geismar, op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>2</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 57.

she grows up with the idea that she must dedicate herself to raising the Negro to a higher level, and until the appearance of Joe Christmas, has spent her life helping Negro colleges, advising young Negroes, and contributing to various development funds. But, Joanna has become warped by the submergence of her true self beneath her role of missionary and her relationship with Joe Christmas reveals this fact. She has been forced to bury a part of herself, but the needs and desires are there; and, when they are awakened too late for normal fulfillment in children and a home, something horrible happens to her. Cleanth Brooks comments on the metamorphosis which she undergoes as a result of her first sexual encounter:

Faulkner is pitiless in recounting the details of Joanna's sexual discovery of herself and in indicating the man's revulsion from her---his feeling that he was "being sucked down in a bottomless morass" (p. 227). But there is never any question that Joanna is essentially the victim---of sex too long repressed, of sex driven up into the head---or of her being compelled to her actions by a self that she had scarcely known existed. To witness Joanna's one love affair is like watching a stunted autumnal plant frantically trying to bloom and seed itself before the killing frosts...<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas, brief though it is, is perhaps the strangest man-woman relationship in all of Faulkner's novels. When Joe Christmas provides an opportunity for the sexual gratification which her puritanic background and personal circumstances have denied her, she, now free of her inhibitions, becomes so completely demoralized that she even shocks Joe with her nymphomania. Having remained a virgin for over forty years, Joanna's

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 58.

initial response to sex is that of a fanatic. She enjoys the corruption and even prays to God to allow her to remain corrupt for a few more years. She seems to enjoy the corruption more by screaming "Negro! Negro! Negro!" (p. 245) as he makes love to her. As the relationship progresses, she becomes more obsessed. She would sometimes go into fits of jealousy for no apparent reason; she would also assign places for secret meetings and leave little notes telling him to find her. Sometimes she would even hide naked in closets and sometimes he would find her beneath shrubs, "naked or with her clothing half torn to ribbons upon her, in the wild throes of nymphomania" (p. 245). In six months she becomes completely corrupt. Once the seed has sprouted, once she has tried to return to that period of her adolescence which her subsequent experience has erased, there is for Joanna no compromise:

...The impervious and fierce urgency that concealed an actual despair at frustrate and irrevocable years, which she appeared to attempt to compensate each night as if she believed that it would be the last night on earth by damning herself forever to the hell of her forefathers, by living not alone in sin but in filth...She revealed the terrible and impersonal curiosity of a child about forbidden subjects and objects; that rapt and tireless and detached interest of a surgeon in the physical body and its possibilities... (p. 244)

Joanna has the same fierce desire as Faulkner's earthmothers, but to sustain the bloom which Joe Christmas has at last brought forth, she must fulfill the role of the earthmother and negate her ghostliness or barrenness: she must produce a child. So intense is

her desire to do so that she mistakes her menopause for pregnancy, and when time forces her to admit the truth, she can no longer be Joe's lover. She must repent her sins and resume the ghosthood which her previous religious fanaticism required. She must renounce Christ-mas as a sex partner and reform him. She now wants him to make something of his wasted life by going to school and later getting a decent job. He must expiate his sins and kneel and pray with her. When he refuses, she tries to kill him, but her pistol fails and he kills her; for Joe has no use for a praying ghost.

When the love phase ended, the past from which she could not escape began to exert its control over her again. The overwhelming guilt she begins to experience reflects both the Calvinist and Southern ideals which have shaped her personality. The damaging psychological effect of the Calvinistic outlook which represses desires and distorts attitudes toward sex is emphasized quite strongly by Faulkner through the character of Joanna Burden. In an essay which argues that the references to institutional Christianity are strongly critical in Faulkner's works, one critic states:

One of the most tragic results of the fixation upon religion of many of the people of Yoknapatawpha County, it appears from Faulkner's works, is the debilitating effect of the Calvinistic tradition upon the individual himself or upon his descendants. The Puritan conscience is shown as a haunting tormentor, gnawing at the soul and vitals of the believer. Especially is it oppressive when inherited from the past.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert N. Burrows, "Institutional Christianity as Reflected in the Works of William Faulkner," Mississippi Quarterly, XIV (Summer, 1961), p. 145.

The chief cause of Joanna Burden's tragic life has been the overwhelming oppressiveness of the Calvinistic spirit which she inherited from her ancestors.

Most of the negative criticism concerning Faulkner's treatment of women is directed at this group of women---the perverted, psychotic spinsters or "ghosts" who seem to have no redeeming qualities. While it is true that these characters can only be looked upon as misfits, it would seem that Faulkner's anger is leveled not so much at them as individuals, but at his own Southern tradition which has created this kind of woman.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE "EARTHMOTHERS"

In a lower social class form the women already discussed, there are a few women who are not subject to the pressures of caste and class conventions. Of these women, Faulkner admires those who are vital and natural, and who accept the physical facts of life simply or without difficulty.<sup>1</sup> He admires the courage and endurance of these women who have "a very fine belief in life, in the basic possibility for happiness and goodness."<sup>2</sup> David Miller has classified these fertile, enduring women as "earthmothers" and in the following passage offers an explanation for their existence:

...When the feudal social structure which had insured the virginity of ladies failed, and not even the wealthy owned females could afford sabbaticals, when the conditions of life became harder even than in frontier days, there came forth a group which, though coeval with human kind, is obscured by the niceties of wealth and civilization. Its members could come from the tradition of the Compsons or the foster-home of Lena Grove. Its chief characteristics are endurance and sex. Emmy (Soldier's Pay), Dewey Dell (As I Lay Dying), and Belle (Sartoris) are earthmothers. Their actions are dictated almost wholly by the core of unsophisticated, eternal, amoral fecundity which

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<sup>1</sup>Kerr, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 12.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds, Faulkner in the University, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 97.

Faulkner portrays so clearly...The power and importance of the earthmother is, for Faulkner, greater than that of all classes of human beings... (p. 8)

It is important to point out now that this "earthmother" quality can be found both in Faulkner's admirable and not-so-admirable women. "Whether the possessor of it is admirable or not is of no concern; good and bad women share the quality, although a good woman's efforts may soften its effects."<sup>1</sup> The sexual power of the earthmother is both a powerful and an ambivalent force, in other words. The sexuality that Faulkner incarnates in Eula Varner, for example is both sacred and bestial. "Fecund and foul", "unchaste and inviolable", she is the "unawares bitch" and the eternal earth goddess.<sup>2</sup> He pays tribute to her as "some symbology out of the old Dionystic times--honey in sunlight and bursting grapes, the writhen bleeding of the crushed fecundated vine beneath the hard rapacious trampling goat-hoof."<sup>3</sup> But, he also derides her and describes her in terms of animals: "'She's just like a dog! Soon as she passes anything in long pants she begins to give off something. You can smell it! You can smell it ten feet away!'"<sup>4</sup> The earthmother's sexuality is a strong power which threatens man and involves him in an endless struggle with woman and with himself. The power of woman both enthralls and

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<sup>1</sup>Miller, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 9.

<sup>2</sup>William Faulkner, The Hamlet, (New York: Random House, 1940), pp. 135, 131, and 149 respectively.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>4</sup>The Hamlet, p. 112.

destroys.<sup>1</sup> This idea is conveyed through the many drowning images associated with Faulkner's women. Joanna Burden seems a "sewer" into which Joe Christmas has fallen, "a bottomless morass" into which he is being sucked, "a swamp" in which he is drowning.<sup>2</sup> This drowning image suggests his sense of being threatened and defiled by Joanna. This image is also a part of a pattern in Faulkner's works which signifies for his male protagonists the threat of woman and her sexuality.<sup>3</sup> In Light in August, one male character defines "Woman" as the "Passive andn Anonymous whom God had created to be not alone the recipient and receptacle of the seed of his body, but of his spirit too."<sup>4</sup> The female principle, then, is capable of absorbing man's aspirations and ideals just as the woman physically absorbs him and his need.<sup>5</sup> Throughout Faulkner's works, the weight of female nature resists man and pulls him down.

David Miller also points out the ambivalence of the earthmother:

...The earthmother can be many things, as innocent as Lena Grove, as debased as Joanna Burden, or as self-seeking as Belle Mitchell, but all share the capacity for suffering and endurance which enables the "woman" of The Old Man to give birth successfully to a child among the snakes and decaying flooded-island vegetation with no other surgical instrument than an old tin can...<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Backman, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>2</sup>Light in August, pp. 242 and 246.

<sup>3</sup>Backman, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>4</sup>Light in August, p. 408.

<sup>5</sup>Lorch, Mississippi Quarterly, XX, 29.

<sup>6</sup>Miller, Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, 10.

Despite her positive qualities, however, she can be a threat to man:

...And she is a tyrant, the very substance of her subjugates all men. Januarius Jones, Joe Christmas, the deputy sheriff of Pylon, Snopes of Sartoris, Popeye (Sanctuary) and even Ike Snopes of The Hamlet, though they all victimize their respective females, are themselves victims of the lust engendered by earthmothers...inviolability...is an attribute of the earthmother...<sup>1</sup>

Faulkner seems to dislike some of his earthmothers while admiring others. Belle Mitchell of Sartoris he seems to dislike strongly. Having literally trapped Horace Benbow and having gotten him to take her from her husband, she is described as drowning him in the sea of woman, so to speak: "And then Belle again, enveloping him like a rich and fatal drug, like a motionless and cloying sea in which he watched himself drown."<sup>2</sup> She is the kind of woman who consciously uses her body to certify her domination over men:

"Come," she said, rising. Horace rose, and Belle preceded him and they crossed the lawn and entered the house...Belle slid her hand into his, clutching his hand against her silken thigh, and led him on through a dusky passage and into her music room. This room was quiet too and empty and she stopped against him half turning, and they kissed..."You haven't told me you love me," Belle said, touching his face with her finger tips, and the fine devastation of his hair, "not in a long time."

"Not since yesterday," Horace agreed, but he told her, she leaning her breast against him and listening with a sort of rapt, voluptuous inattention, like a great, silk cat... (p. 163)

There is no doubt that Belle is a real bitch. She is seen by Aunt Jenny for what she is and Narcissa, Horace's sister, describes

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<sup>1</sup>Miller, Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, 10.

<sup>2</sup>Sartoris, p. 10.

her with loathing and hatred as "dirty" (p. 167). Even Horace himself is aware of Belle's selfishness and cruelty but he is too weak to do anything about it. In Sanctuary, Horace is fleeing from his wife's sovereignty. In the loathed image of himself carrying a box of dripping shrimps to his wife and trailed by the "small stinking spots" (p. 19), he sees the symbol of his humiliated manhood.

His defense of Goodwin and his championing of Ruby Lamar are, like his flight, part of the rebellion against the gnawing frustration and hollow propriety of his life with Belle.

Lena Grove, on the other hand, represents all that is positive in the earthmother and it is obvious that Faulkner admires her. In an interview, as an answer to a question concerning whether his characters carry a sense of submission to their fate, Faulkner has this to say about Lena:

"...I would say that Lena Grove coped pretty well with hers. It didn't matter to her in her destiny whether her man was Lucas Burch or not. It was her destiny to have a husband and children and she knew it, and so she went out and attended to it without asking help from anyone. She was the captain of her soul. One of the calmest, sanest speeches I ever heard was when she said to Byron Bunch at the very instant of repulsing his final desperate and despairing attempt at rape, "Ain't you ashamed? You might have woke the baby." She was never for one moment confused, frightened, alarmed. She did not even know that she didn't need pity...<sup>1</sup>

Lena Grove is presented as a simple, unsophisticated country girl who has an abundance of strength and determination. Having gotten

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<sup>1</sup>Malcolm Cowley, ed., Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, (New York: Viking Press, 1958), p. 139.

pregnant and having been deserted by her lover, she feels it is her duty to pursue him and provide her unborn child with a father. She does not hide or become embarrassed by the fact that she is unmarried and pregnant, but begins at once to do what she feels she must and that is to walk, though nine months pregnant, and find her man so they can marry before the baby comes. One critic describes her thusly:

Lena Grove is one of those intensely female females we meet in Faulkner's books, like Eula Varner in *The Hamlet*. A somewhat bovine earthmother, she has all those womanly qualities which, as Faulkner likes to point out, baffle, fascinate, outrage, and finally defeat men. According to Faulkner's gynecological demonology...men are more interesting and valuable than women but the dark or Satanic principle of the universe decrees that they are the weaker sex and are doomed to be frustrated and ephemeral...In Lena's unvarying inner harmony all opposites and disparates are reconciled or perhaps rendered meaningless. By implying that Lena Grove somehow symbolizes this ideal unity Faulkner suggests no metaphysical reconciliation. He merely praises again the quiet enduring stoicism and wisdom of the heart which he finds among the poor whites, Negroes, and other socially marginal types.<sup>1</sup>

Light in August begins with Lena sitting beside a road in Mississippi, her feet in a ditch, her shoes in her hand. She has been on the road for a month, riding in a long succession of farmwagons or walking the hot dusty roads, trying to get to Jefferson. To emphasize her overwhelming capacity for endurance, the image of the urn of Keats'

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Chase, *The American Novel and its Tradition*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), pp. 212-213.

ode is used symbolically in connection with her. She is described as "something moving forever and without progress across an urn" (p. 5). Circular imagery, which suggests her completeness as a person, is also associated with Lena. She becomes an integral part of the natural surroundings: "She went out of sight up the road: swollen, slow, deliberate, unhurried and tireless as augmenting afternoon itself" (p. 7).

Her nature is one which allows her to commune with other people. Even the women who look upon her swollen body with evident disapproval offer their coins to help her and the community of which she eventually becomes a part rallies to help her. Unlike the principal male characters in the novel, she does not suffer from frustration and alienation. She becomes a part of the community to which she comes as a stranger, without force or difficulty. More importantly, however, she is the means through which other characters are brought back into the community and to life. Before the arrival of Lena, Byron Bunch is virtually isolated from the community. His only acquaintance is the Rev. Gail Hightower, who is also an outcast, completely isolated from the group. Merely by her simple questions and concern for others, Lena forces Byron to become involved with the living. After revealing to her the identity of Joe Brown, alias Lucas Burch, he then feels responsible for her. This feeling of responsibility draws Byron out of his lethargic existence and forces him back into the community. Having lived as a celibate for more than thirty years, he now becomes involved with another person. Not only does he prepare for Lena's child and act

as her protector but he falls in love and changes from a vegetable to a person committed to living a full life.

Lena is also the means--though more indirectly--by which Rev. Hightower is redeemed. The act of delivering Lena's child, though forced upon him, becomes symbolic of his restoration to life. As he walks back to town, he notices the peaceful and fecund aspects of nature for the first time in a long time:

..."I must do this more often," he thinks, feeling the intermitten sun, the heat, smelling the savage and fecund odor of the earth, the woods, the loud silence...It seems to him that he can see, feel, about him the ghosts of rich fields, and of the rich fecund black life of the quarters, the mellow shouts, the presence of fecund women, the prolific naked children in the dust before the doors...(pp. 384-385)

Everything combines to make Hightower realize the miracle of life and to acknowledge that "'Life comes to the old man yet'" (p. 383). This act of involvement, precipitated by Lena's presence, has restored Hightower to the human race. Lena has brought life, then, both literally and figuratively, to the community of Jefferson.

It has been said that Lena comes closest to assimilating and integrating herself with the quality of the earthmother and is perhaps Faulkner's most perfect example of the "fertility goddess".<sup>1</sup> The female principle embodied in Lena is a force for good rather than a source of conflict for the novel's male characters:

...Lena is one of Faulkner's several embodiments of the female principle---indeed, one

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<sup>1</sup>Kerr, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 12.



of the purest and least complicated of his embodiments. Her rapport with nature is close...She is never torn by doubts and indecisions. There is no painful introspection. This serene composure has frequently been put down to sheer mindlessness, and Lena, to be sure, is a very simple young woman. But Faulkner himself undoubtedly attributes most of Lena's quiet force to her female nature...In the Faulknerian world men have to lose their innocence, confront the hard choice, and through a process of initiation discover reality. But women are already in possession of this knowledge, naturally and instinctively...In Light in August the principal male characters suffer alienation. They are separated from the community, are in rebellion against it---against nature. But Lena moves serenely into the community and it gathers itself about her with protective gestures...Lena embodies the principle upon which any human community is founded. She is the carrier of life, and she has to be protected and nurtured if there is to be any community at all.<sup>1</sup>

The novel closes with the actions of Lena just as it has opened with her. This emphasis on Lena leads the reader, at least momentarily, from the horrifying tragedy of Joe Christmas, and the final emphasis is on the renewal of life in the person of Lena's baby. Such women as Lena Grove, unlike their men, are akin to the "fecund" earth and like the earth, "potential sources for renewal and development."<sup>2</sup>

Ruby Goodwin of Sanctuary is another Faulknerian earthmother and one of the novel's few sympathetic characters. Though she is

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

<sup>2</sup>Zink, Modern Fiction Studies, II, 396.

from the lower segment of Mississippi society and is in conflict with the "respectable" women of the town to which she comes for her common-law husband's trial, she is to be admired for her loyalty, her power of endurance, and her willingness to suffer anything in order to help the man she loves, even though he may not deserve it. Commenting upon her earthiness and her realistic approach to life, one critic says:

The only figures in the book who take life in the body with simple, earthy realism, who hate and murder or love and make love wholeheartedly, and without reservation, are Goodwin, the moonshiner, and his mate Ruby... They alone are not moved to revulsions of feeling by excrement, by hunger, dirt, and bleeding, or by any of the other natural phenomena of the body's living. They alone have no fear of the body, be it male or female...<sup>1</sup>

One of Ruby's functions in the novel is to serve as a foil for Temple Drake, female protagonist:

...Loyalty and fidelity are the keynotes of Ruby's character; but they are of a kind that transcends narrow moral definition. She is a whore of necessity but she is uncorrupted; she is the foil, then, of Temple, who is not a whore but is spiritually rotten. She embodies the basic virtues of love, hard work and honesty which neither perverted sexuality, parental failure or vicious law can destroy...<sup>2</sup>

This would suggest Ruby's "moral" superiority over the other more conventional characters in the novel. While Temple would like to give

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence S. Kubie, "William Faulkner's Sanctuary," Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Robert Penn Warren (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup>David L. Frazier, "Gothicism in Sanctuary," Modern Fiction Studies, II, (Autumn, 1956), p. 119.

the impression that she is an innocent victim of circumstances, Ruby, in a characteristic manner, views her realistically. She sees through her hypocrisy:

"Oh, I know your sort," the woman said. "Honest women. Too good to have anything to do with common people. You'll slip out at night with the kids, but just let a man come along"... "Take all you can get and give nothing. 'I'm a pure girl; I don't do that.' You'll slip out with the kids and burn their gasoline and eat their food, but just let a man so much as look at you and you faint away because your father the judge and your four brothers might not like it. But just let you get into a jam, then who do you come crying to? to us, the ones that are not good enough to lace the judge's almighty shoes..."<sup>1</sup>

In telling Temple the limitations of her sophisticated femininity, Ruby gives a striking description of the animal quality which real women possess and upbraids her for knowing nothing about love and life:

"...And you, you little doll-faced slut, that think you can't come into a room where a man is without him..." Beneath the faded garment her breast moved deep and full. With her hands on her hips she looked at Temple with cold, blazing eyes. "Man? You've never seen a real man. You don't know what it is to be wanted by a real man. And thank your stars you haven't and never will, for then you'd find just what that little putty face is worth, and all the rest of it you think you are jealous of when you're just scared of it. And if he is just man enough to call you whore, you'll say Yes Yes and you'll crawl naked in the dirt and the mire for him to call you that..." (p. 57)

If Ruby speaks too pointedly here, she at least speaks honestly and perceptively. Though appearances have provided Temple with sanctuaries

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, Sanctuary, (New York: Random House, 1931), p. 55.

or escapes from reality up until now, by the end of the novel Faulkner completely and unmercifully unmask her and reveals that all of the things which Ruby accuses her of being, including a disguised slut, are true.

Unlike Temple, who is self-centered and inhuman, even to the point that she would send an innocent man to his death without even the slightest twinge of conscience, Ruby feels that no sacrifice is too great for her to make for the man she loves. Completely self-effacing, she tells Temple, without shame, how she has once prostituted herself to raise money for her man while he is in jail:

"I have slaved for that man,"... "I worked night shift as a waitress so I could see him Sundays at the prison. I lived two years in a single room, cooking over a gasjet, because I promised him. I lied to him and made money to get him out of prison, and when I told him how I made it, he beat me..." (p. 59)

Though she meets with obstacles and failures, she continues to try and rescue Goodwin from predicaments of his own making. She tries one last time, when he is falsely accused of murder, and continues to try and save him until he is lynched. She even offers her body to Horace, the lawyer, as pay for his counsel because she has no money. If we are overwhelmed by the presence of truly evil people in the novel, Cleanth Brooks reminds us that we can look to Ruby, though a one-time prostitute, the common-law wife of a murderer, and a hustler, for relief:

...Yet if Narcissa and Temple terrify Horace with their lack of any final morality, one must

remember that there are also in the novel women like Ruby and Miss Jenny, women who for all their great differences and dissimilar attitudes, are both feminine and yet both fundamentally decent...<sup>1</sup>

Ruby's genuine red-blooded qualities, as her name implies, enable her to achieve a dignity, ironically enough, which no other character in the novel is able to achieve.

These earthmothers, unlike Faulkner's masculine or barren women, do not shrink from physical encounters with men nor do they live as hypocrites hiding behind appearances. They are proud of their femininity and do not try to repress their earthy qualities or their sexual nature. In general, they are practical, devoted, loving, strong, patient, and compassionate. When they, on the other hand, use their femininity and sexual attractiveness, as Belle Mitchell does, to ensnare men, Faulkner treats them with contempt. Miller indicates that all of Faulkner's women are potential earthmothers and that when they become de-sexed or ghosts (for they are not born so), it is only because they have refused, either because of parental or societal pressures, to let their feminine natures develop fully.<sup>2</sup> And, he hastens to add, even when a woman becomes a ghost, it does not happen without a struggle from the would-be earthmother:

Faulkner's women cannot escape the consequences of being earthmothers, even when they try to do so. Drusilla of The Unvanquished cut her hair, wore men's clothing, and rode with Colonel Sartoris against the Yankees, yet try

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 137-138.

<sup>2</sup>Miller, Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, 9.

as she would she could not escape the odor of verberna nor control the current which passes between herself and her step-son. Neither education, nor station, nor will can eliminate its effects. Even Rosa Coldfield (Absalom, Absalom!) is bid for because of a possible remnant of fertility...<sup>1</sup>

This would imply that there is really no such thing, according to Faulkner, as a genuine de-sexed female. She only remains de-sexed until circumstances provide her with the opportunity to be otherwise. Though, for example, Joanna Burden has been a ghost for almost all of her life, she, when free of parents and isolated from society's censure, becomes a temporary earthmother when Joe Christmas enters her life. To be a virgin, then, is to be contrary to nature. To be an earthmother is to be natural.

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<sup>1</sup>Miller, Modern Fiction Studies, XIII, 10.

## CHAPTER V

### THE "REBELS"

Conformity, with whatever disastrous results may follow, is the more frequent pattern in Faulkner's treatment of women, and his attitude toward the conformists is often compassionate. Rebellion, the reaction of the stronger women, he views with sympathy or scorn, depending upon the honesty and integrity with which a girl faces the consequences of her rebellion.<sup>1</sup> Temple Drake in Sanctuary is the most complete and striking example of the rebel who lacks that honesty. The changing mores of the post-World War I period give her an opportunity to go to college and free herself of the restraints which her social class and family has imposed. When she leaves the court room surrounded by her aristocratic father, Judge Drake, and four brothers, she is, ironically, lauded by the District Attorney as the most sacred epitome of Southern Womanhood. But, her childish violation of college rules and family training has caused two deaths, those of Red, killed by Popeye's gunmen, and of Lee Goodwin, innocent of the crime for which he was lynched. Goodwin's life she could have saved by telling the truth and thus atoning for the evil she has caused. "Sanctuary," it appears, is the refuge the Southern code pro-

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<sup>1</sup>Kerr, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 10.

vides for the woman who wishes to enjoy vice and have the rewards of virtue, or who wants to have her cake and eat it too.

Caddy Compson (The Sound and the Fury), on the other hand, is the rebel for whom Faulkner seems to have the greatest sympathy.<sup>1</sup> Instead of conforming to the traditional ideals of Southern womanhood, she refuses to suppress her feminine nature and become a "Southern lady". Significantly, she is the daughter of the woman who, among Faulkner's characters, expresses the greatest devotion to the Southern concept of womanhood and shows the greatest lack of ethical sense and the greatest hypocrisy. Instead of beliefs, Mrs. Compson has a pathetic allegiance to the idea of womanhood as she has conceived it from romantic illusion. For her to be a "lady", to wear femininity as an ornament, is an end in itself. Some of the most pointed and effective irony is directed at Mrs. Compson's unsatisfying dependence on her concept of herself as a Southern "lady". When she reflects on the self-destruction of her son, she does so in these ironic terms:

"I don't know. What reason did Quentin have? Under God's heaven what reason did he have? It cant be simply to flout and hurt me. Whoever God is, He could not permit that. I'm a lady. You might not believe that from my offspring, but I am."<sup>2</sup>

A whining, self-centered, useless woman, Mrs. Compson lacks any genuine emotions or maternal tenderness. She wears mourning for Caddy's lost "virtue" but takes her to a winter resort to get a husband though she

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<sup>1</sup>Kerr, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 11.

<sup>2</sup>The Sound and the Fury, p. 374.



knows Caddy is already pregnant. Mrs. Compson shows none of the finer qualities of true ladies and one is forced to conclude that her constant assertions that she is a lady are the result of her inner awareness that she is not.

Faulkner's treatment of Drusilla Hawk of The Unvanquished reveals the negative effect of a woman's assuming what should be the male's position, and of rebelling against the traditional ideal of womanhood. Drusilla, who becomes almost "unsexed" chooses a role too difficult and dangerous for her. When she first appears in the novel, she is described in masculine terms:

"...She was not tall; it was the way she stood and walked. She had on pants, like a man. She was the best woman rider in the country...Her hair was cut short; it looked like Father's would when he would tell Granny about him and the men cutting each other's hair with a bayonet. She was sunburned and her hands were hard and scratched like a man's that works..." (pp. 73-75)

She later confides to her young cousin, Bayard, her wish to join John Sartoris' troop, which she later does. She indicates to him quite explicitly her reasons for coming to this unusual decision in a bitter commentary which repudiates the traditional life of a woman:

"...Living used to be dull, you see, Stupid. You lived in the same house your father was born in...and then you grew up and you fell in love with your acceptable young man, and in time you would marry him, in your mother's wedding gown, perhaps, and with the same silver for presents she had received; and then you settled down forevermore while you got children to feed and bathe and dress until they grew up, too; and then you and your husband died quietly and were buried together...Stupid, you see. But now you can see for yourself how it is;

it's fine now; you don't have to worry now about the house and silver, because they get burned up and carried away... and you don't have to worry about children to bathe and feed and change, because the young men can ride away and get killed in the fine battles..." (p. 82)

Later in the novel, we see more of the bravery which Drusilla exhibited as a member of Sartoris' calvary, but this time what she defies is not the Federal army but the conventionality of the "female paladins of Southern womanhood and respectability"<sup>1</sup> over her marriage to John Sartoris. Her mother and the other relatives are naturally outraged at Drusilla's unfeminine, and, to them, scandalous conduct, and once the war is over and she has returned home, they demand that she marry Sartoris immediately since they assume that she has been sleeping with him. Prior to this time, it was the mother, a perfect example of the Southern concept of woman at its worst, who revealed to the rest of the family the whereabouts of Drusilla, since they did not know she had joined the army:

Dear Sister:

I think this will be news to you as it was to me though I both hope and pray it will not be the heart-rending shock to you as it was to me as naturally it cannot since you are only an aunt while I am the mother. But it is not myself I am thinking of since I am a woman, a mother, a Southern woman, and it has been our lot during the last four years to learn to bear anything. But when I think of my husband who laid down his life to protect a heritage of courageous men and spotless women looking down from heaven upon a daughter who had deliberately cast away that for which he died, and when

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<sup>1</sup>Backman, op. cit., p. 118.

I think of my half-orphan son who will one day ask  
of me why his martyred father's sacrifice  
was not enough to preserve his sister's  
good name...( p. 146)

Worried about appearances, the family is sick over what they imagine  
to be Drusilla's conduct at war:

...there had been reserved for Drusilla the  
highest destiny of a Southern woman---to be  
the bride-widow of a lost cause---and  
Drusilla had not only thrown that away, she  
had not only become a lost woman and a shame  
to her father's memory but she was now  
living in a word that Aunt Louisa would not  
even repeat but that Granny knew what it  
was...Drusilla had been gone for six months...  
and then one night she walked into the cabin...  
in the garments not alone of a man but of a  
common private soldier and told them how she  
had been a member of Father's troop for six  
months, bivouacking at night surrounded by  
sleeping men and not even bothering to put  
up the tent for her and Father except when the  
weather was bad, and Drusilla not only showed  
neither shame nor remorse but actually pre-  
tended she did not even know what Aunt Louisa  
was talking about; when Aunt Louisa told her  
that she and Father must marry at once, Drusilla  
said, "Can't you understand that I am tired  
of burying husbands in this war? That I am  
riding in Cousin John's troop not to find a  
man but to hurt Yankees?" and Aunt Louisa  
said:

"At least don't call him Cousin John where  
strangers can hear you." (pp. 146-147)

But, the husband Drusilla does not desire, along with the wedding  
dress and veil, is forced upon her by her conventional mother to re-  
deem Drusilla's reputation and the family name. Drusilla could face  
gunfire but not her mother's inflexible conventionality.<sup>1</sup> She does

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<sup>1</sup>Kerr, Mississippi Quarterly, XV, 9.

not marry, however, because she is in love, but because, like a good soldier she obeys her commanding officer, Sartoris, who tells her that she might as well succumb to her family's wishes. Our last sight of Drusilla in the novel is that of a young widow, for the body of her assassinated husband lies in the parlor. Cleanth Brooks makes a final comment on the tragedy of her life:

Drusilla has the defects of her virtue. Faulkner has not tried to portray a kind of Confederate Joan of Arc. She is not so much valiant as hopeless, and she does not hate her country's enemies so much as she hates her own life and her womanhood. She is, at the end, a warped figure, feverish in her pursuit of honor, masculine in her concern for the code and her obsession with the dueling pistols. And she is judged pitilessly. Aunt Jenny Du Pre calls her "a poor hysterical young woman", and after the final scene between Drusilla and young Bayard, it is evident that it will be impossible for her to remain any longer in this house...she has risked an essential distortion of her nature and she pays the penalty...<sup>1</sup>

Let us now take a closer look at the two rebels already mentioned---Temple Drake and Caddy Compson---since their characters are developed more fully than that of Drusilla. Both of these young ladies have been labelled promiscuous, corrupted, irresponsible and sinful. While it is true that their sexual attractiveness brings about much of their difficulty, it is a mistake to assume that Faulkner's attitude toward these two women is essentially the same. Such an evaluation reveals a failure to fully probe their characters and a tendency

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

to classify all of Faulkner's young women as having basically the same negative features.

Temple Drake, unlike Caddy Compson and unlike many of Faulkner's women, seems to have a "secret rapport with evil."<sup>1</sup> In spite of the terror and violent affront that she feels as a result of the unnatural rape which she suffers, the experience is not so much a disillusionment as a "discovery of her own capacities, resources, and deepest drives and desires"<sup>2</sup>---most of which are potentially evil. To say this is not to rely entirely upon Requiem for a Nun, in which Temple, a few years later, is very hard on herself and confesses that she discovered that she liked evil. Even in Sanctuary there is plenty of evidence to support her statement. She is indeed a mockery of the "chaste" womanhood of the South and rebels against all of its ideals.

Despite charges against Sanctuary that it is a poor novel because its characters are opaque, that Faulkner has not let the reader see into the workings of their minds, especially Temple's, and that the critical events involving Temple have not been adequately prepared for,<sup>3</sup> it is possible to discern why Temple does some of the despicable things she does. The depravity of man was for Faulkner a clear reality and this can explain his conception of characters like Temple and Popeye. Many have asked the following questions about Temple and offered weak answers: Why does she not try to get away from the Old Frenchman's Place since it is obvious that she may meet disaster

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Robert L. Mason, "A Defense of Faulkner's Sanctuary," Georgia Review, XXI (Winter, 1967), p. 430.

there? Why does she lead Popeye to the rendezvous where she knows he intends to kill Red, whom, if she does not love, she certainly does not hate? Why does she not take advantage of Benbow's visit to Miss Reba's whorehouse in Memphis (where she is hiding) to try and get out of the place and back to her home? Why does she lie on the witness stand when she knows it will send an innocent man to his death? Temple herself gives the answer in Requiem for a Nun: "Temple Drake liked evil."<sup>1</sup> It is just that simple, and Faulkner makes this clear to the perceptive reader again and again throughout Sanctuary. He is the realist or pessimist when he shows that there are some people who commit evil because they like it---not for gain, or knowledge, or revenge, or love, or even hate.

From the beginning of the novel, Faulkner focuses the reader's attention on Temple's mixed feelings, her ambivalent responses to the evil around her after she arrives at Old Frenchman's Place, as a result of a car accident in which her boyfriend, Gowan Stevens, is driving. The evidence is overwhelming that Temple in moments of decision is always swayed by her fascination for evil. "She is a deliberate voyager into evil."<sup>2</sup> Wherever she has a choice, and she has several, at the Old Frenchman's Place and in Memphis on the road between the two places, she chooses the worse course of action. That Temple is fascinated by evil is evident when she leaves Gowan's wrecked car. She wants to leave and she wants to

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun, (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 135.

<sup>2</sup>Mason, Georgia Review, XXI, 432.

stay; she is repulsed by the people there and yet she is fascinated by them. Both her speeches and her actions reveal this ambivalence. Though her first reaction when she sees the place is "I don't want to go there" (p. 47), she immediately encourages the attention of the half-wit Tommy, who is wandering around the premises. When they reach the house, she does not remain on the porch, which is customary social practice unless invited elsewhere, but goes on an exploration through the hall and out the back to the porch. From here on, she could hardly have made a show of herself more. At one time she sees Popeye halfway between the house and the barn. Instead of removing herself from his presence, since he terrifies her, she 'met Popeye halfway to the house. Without ceasing to run she appeared to pause...for an appreciable instant she faced Popeye with a grimace of taut, toothed coquetry" (p. 56). Popeye later makes this comment to Gowan: "'Make your whore lay off me, Jack'" (p. 133). Though Popeye has managed to ignore Temple up until this point, her constant bumping into him and questioning him cause him to notice her more. At points it even seems as if she is subtly flirting with him. Ruby is quite aware of Temple's proclivity to evil and teases her about it: "'I know your sort. I've seen them. All running, but not too fast'" (P. 71). When she has an opportunity to leave, she consistently passes it by.

Faulkner's detailed description of Temple's preparation for bed reveals that she secretly wishes for something to happen to her. Though she puts her raincoat over her underclothes after she has removed her dress, maybe symbolic of her wish to defend herself, what follows this gesture hardly indicates a desire for protection:

Again she paused. She opened the raincoat and produced a compact from somewhere, and, watching her motions in the tiny mirror, she spread and fluffed her hair with her fingers and powdered her face and replaced the compact and looked at the watch again and fastened the raincoat... (pp. 83-84)

Later, at Miss Reba's in Memphis, Temple tells Benbow that she had imagined she was a boy that night, and how surprised whoever it was would be when he found out, but that when he did come and stand over her bed she said, "Come on. Touch me. You're a coward if you don't. Coward! Coward!...I got mad because he was so long doing it" (pp. 211-212). This would imply that she secretly desires the rape that is to come to her the following day.

When Temple is in the car with Popeye the next day, after she has been raped by him and after he has murdered Tommy, Temple screams, but she screams only when they are between towns and the road is clear; when people are passing or they are in a town, she, ironically, does not scream. At a filling station, Popeye leaves the car and enters a store down the street, but Temple neither asks the filling station attendant for help nor tries to get away. She does leave the car and hide behind a trash can, but it is only because she might be seen by someone who knows her if she stays in the car. When Popeye finds her, she explains that a young man she knows almost saw her and this is why she is hiding. Escaping is not as important to her as keeping up appearances.

Temple's actions in the first part of the novel, then, prepare us for her behavior in Memphis and later in the Jefferson courtroom. When she is taken by Popeye to Miss Reba's whorehouse in Memphis, she



again makes no attempt to leave and seems to enjoy her surroundings. In fact, during her stay here she becomes completely corrupted and abandons all the social values of her group. She becomes the lover of a gangster, Red, and permits Popeye to watch them having sex relations. She has absolutely no interest in Red, however, as a human being; she is only interested in his body and therefore cooperates with Popeye when he plans to kill Red because he has gotten jealous of Red's and Temple's relationship. At the moment of Red's greatest danger, her one thought is to obtain just one more second of sexual gratification:

...She began to say Ah-ah-ah-ah in an expiring voice, her body arching slowly backward as though faced by an exquisite torture. When he touched her she sprang like a bow, hurling herself upon him, her mouth gaped and ugly like that of a dying fish as she writhed her loins against him...With her hips grinding against him, her mouth gaping in straining protrusion, bloodless, she began to speak.  
 "Let's hurry. Anywhere. I've quit him...  
 "Please. Please. Please. Please. Dont make me wait. I'm burning up."...  
 "I cant wait. You've got to. I'm on fire, I tell you..." (pp. 232-233)

Later she does not regret or mourn Red's death but only that "it will never be again" (p. 230). Her behavior here reminds us of her first night at the Old Frenchman's Place. It seems that in both cases evil and violence or the threat of violence serve as sexual stimuli.

So, Temple's action at the trial in Jefferson should be no surprise---to Benbow, perhaps, but not to the reader. After making the choices she has made throughout the novel, what else could she be expected to do but lie and send an innocent man to his death. She is

a frightening being with great capacity for destruction, and one who has made use of that capacity and to whom evil is even a sustaining power.<sup>1</sup> Despite her evil and corruption, however, she remains a "lady" as far as the Jefferson community is concerned. Only a few in the novel really know how much of a mockery she is of the "chaste" Southern woman.

While Faulkner is apparently repulsed by Temple, he admires the rebel, Caddy Compson, of The Sound and the Fury. Faulkner in 1954, speaking with an intensely passionate devotion, remembered her as "the beautiful one, she was my heart's darling. That's what I wrote the book about and I used the tools which seemed to me the proper tools to try to tell, try to draw the picture of Caddy."<sup>2</sup> And he adds, "'...Caddy was still to me too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on...'"<sup>3</sup> Thus to Faulkner, Caddy is not only central, but also beautiful and moving. Caddy's life represents love, compassion, pity and sacrifice in a family which is destroying itself through its lack of these qualities, and it is this fact which probably prompted Faulkner to speak of Caddy in such endearing terms. This most important role of Caddy's mentioned above is also the most neglected by the critics. To many critics, she is only a promiscuous nymphomaniac. To Cleanth Brooks she is "the sexual adventuress adrift in the world",<sup>4</sup> and to Foster she is a "sensitive

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<sup>1</sup>Mason, Georgia Review, XXI, 437.

<sup>2</sup>Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 342.

beautiful girl, but given to bitchery from her early teens."<sup>1</sup> Certainly there is some basis for these feelings. Caddy has affairs with several men, becomes pregnant and marries a man she does not love in order to give her unborn child a father. To judge her solely on the basis of these facts, however, is to distort her character completely.

That Caddy's life is a cohesive force in the novel can easily be seen. She is the central concern of each brother, and the telling of her story is the common purpose of each section. She causes the other characters to speak out.<sup>2</sup> That Caddy's life is significant for the development of the story is also apparent. Her most important and distinctive quality is unselfish love.<sup>3</sup> She is the only Compson who loves without thought for self and with a genuine desire for the happiness of others, especially for her two brothers, Benjy and Quentin. She is the only human factor in Benjy's life, with the possible exception of Dilsey, which gives it meaning, for the other things he loves are inanimate objects---the fire, the pasture, the red and yellow cushion, and the jimson weed. She gets into bed with him when his hands are cold, and tries to make him happy by telling him about Christmas. She has the ability to sense what he

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<sup>1</sup>Campbell and Foster, op. cit., p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>Catherine B. Baum, "'The Beautiful One': Caddy Compson as Heroine of The Sound and the Fury," Modern Fiction Studies, XII (Spring, 1967), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

wants and the initiative to get it for him. The beauty of Caddy's love becomes especially prominent when seen against the background of the other characters' lack of concern for Benjy's happiness. Quentin never hurts Benjy, but neither does he show any affection for him. Jason pesters and teases Benjy by cutting up his paper dolls. Mrs. Compsons's words to Benjy always lack real feeling.

The reaction of Caddy's daughter, Quentin, to Benjy also heightens the effect of Caddy's tenderness by contrast. Quentin feels only disgust and repugnance for Benjy and his repulsive table manners, whereas Caddy patiently feeds him. Cleanth Brooks makes the following statements about Quentin in comparison with her mother, Caddy:

She...lacks certain virtues that her mother possessed: graciousness, pity, and disinterested love. Quentin despises Benjy, the unfortunate to whom Caddy gave her love, and this is not hard to understand, remembering that she has always seen Benjy as an adult-sized all-but-mindless being and never as the little brother---the relationship in which her mother knew him...<sup>1</sup>

The qualities Caddy evinces before her loss of innocence---her self-reliance, courage, independence, and especially her love---are attributes that certainly make her "beautiful". Ironically enough, however, those qualities in her character that are admirable are the ones which lead to her fall: her complete selflessness, which leads her to be indifferent to her virginity and to what happens to her; her willingness to put the other person's interest first; and her great

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 340.

desire to communicate love.<sup>1</sup> Caddy's interest in men is a natural part of growing up and her giving herself to Dalton for the first time reveals not only her love, or her promiscuous tendencies, as some would have us believe, but also her selflessness. Love is to her more important than morality and respectability, and she has been taught no good reason for preserving her chastity or upholding the ideals of the "chaste" Southern woman. All her mother cares about is the appearance of virtue and Caddy places no value on her maidenhood, which means "no more than a hangnail"<sup>2</sup> to her. What does matter to her is the communication of love. Mr. Compson perhaps best expresses Caddy's attitude toward virginity when he says it is "contrary to nature."<sup>3</sup> Virginity, despite puritanical code, is just one of the "high dead words."<sup>4</sup> Caddy, then, openly rebels against the restricting social conventions of her society and gives herself freely to those for whom she feels affection. The men in Caddy's life after Dalton appear only vaguely in the novel, and one can only speculate about Caddy's motives in going with them. There is no evidence that she loved them as she had Dalton, but her indifferent attitude toward virginity and her need to give and receive love, which she has not found at home, may explain her giving herself to them.

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<sup>1</sup>Baum, Modern Fiction Studies, XII, 38.

<sup>2</sup>The Sound and the Fury, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

In the novel's "Appendix," Faulkner comments upon Caddy's tragic fate and her overwhelming capacity for love:

Doomed and knew it, accepted the doom without either seeking or fleeing it. Loved her brother despite him...she loved him not only in spite of but because of the fact that he himself was incapable of love, accepting the fact that he must value above all not her but the virginity of which she was custodian and on which she placed no value whatever... (p. 413)

Though she is a rebel, and cares nothing for the virginity which her family and society values so highly, and though she gets pregnant and marries someone who is not the father, she at least is not a hypocrite or one who hides behind appearances. In her marriage to Herbert, Caddy is willing to assume responsibility for her actions. She cares nothing for Herbert but does not marry him only because she is pregnant and desirous of preserving the family's honor; her concern for Benjy and her father has convinced her that marrying Herbert is the only thing she can do. By marrying Herbert, Caddy hopes she will enable her father to stop worrying about her and to stop drinking. Then he will not die in a year, as he predicts, and Benjy will not have to be sent to an asylum. Like Faulkner's earthmothers, Caddy refuses to suppress her nature and become a ghost. But Caddy eventually loses her capacity for love as a result of the tragic circumstances of her life and succumbs to the destruction around her, unlike the usual earthmother. "The wasteful loss of Caddy's great capacity for compassion and sacrifice makes her fate the most unbearable and tragic doom in The Sound and the Fury."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Baum, Modern Fiction Studies, XII, 44.

## CONCLUSION

The absence in Faulkner's novels of genuine heroines in the romantic tradition and the scarcity of truly admirable women characters might indeed suggest that Faulkner lacks sympathy and high regard for women. But, to conclude as Irving Howe has, that Faulkner's inability to achieve moral depth in his portraiture of young women indicates a major failing as a novelist is an unfair evaluation. Caddy (The Sound and the Fury) and Judith Sutpen (Absalom, Absalom!), to name only two, would dispel any notion anyone has concerning Faulkner's failure to find any virtues in women below the age of forty. Similarly, Mrs. Compson (The Sound and the Fury), surely past menopause and therefore supposed to be treated with respect, according to Leslie Fiedler, certainly does not possess the usual qualities of Faulkner's elderly women. Both of these examples would seem to extricate Faulkner from the accusation that he is negative in his attitude toward younger women and treats with admiration only those beyond the age of sexual distraction.

After having surveyed the women characters from Faulkner's chief novels, one should arrive at more plausible conclusions about his attitude toward women. Much that he dislikes in them is not that "femaleness" or sexuality which is an innate quality of women, but has its roots in the glorification of woman and the unnatural ideals and conventions fostered by Southern gyneolatry, which is only conducive to the frustration, perversion, or destruction of some women, like Joanna Burden (Light in August) and Miss Rosa (Absalom, Absalom!), and the encouragement in others of shallow frivolity or hypocrisy. He tends to admire

lower-class women who live naturally, according to their instincts, like Lena (Light in August), or upper-class women who have the courage to rebel against convention, like Caddy (The Sound and the Fury). Those who attempt to preserve the appearance of a virtue they lack and who protect themselves by the conventions, like Narcissa (Sartoris and Sanctuary), he scorns. He is not, as some suggest, scorning them because they are young and sexy. And even in these cases his scorn is tempered by feelings of pity: he is careful to fill in Narcissa's background of an invalid mother and a doting father and brother which makes her less culpable than she might have been otherwise, and he builds Requiem for a Nun, a play which resumes Temple's story, on the struggle to save her soul. He also admires those women like Dilsey (The Sound and the Fury), Judith, and Aunt Jenny (Sartoris), who endure when all about them is utter chaos.

The overwhelming implication seems to be that if girls were brought up to be active and useful and were allowed to be women, not angels or ornamental dolls, not ghosts, not even "ladies", they would be spared at least those sorrows and tragedies due to the accident of the time and place in which they were born. Faulkner's ideal among women is the woman who has genuine integrity and honesty---not a false front---who can face and cope with reality, who is courageous, and who has unselfish love and compassion for others. It is true that his most admirable women of this type, both Negro and white, belong to earlier generations and figure in his works chiefly in their old age. The explanation for this limitation may rest in the facts that the War tested the stamina of women in ways that peace, in the South, could never do,



and that Faulkner's own indebtedness to the old women who told him tales about the War gave him a special predilection for their kind. At any rate, his obvious admiration for these women, who are exceptional enough to be rare in any society, and his compassion for others, even younger, women, some of whom have been the victims of family and society, absolve Faulkner of the persistent charge of misogyny.

While it is true that Faulkner, like a primitivist, delineates our civilized world in a very unflattering fashion---as a wasteland full of oversexed and undersexed creatures---he reveals time and time again that women have no monopoly on perversion, obsession and corruption. If Faulkner were unduly angered and disgusted by the frailties and perversities and inhumanity which he found in women, he was equally outraged by his male characters. What woman in his novels, for example, could match the perverseness of Popeye (Sanctuary), who violates Temple with a corn cob because he is impotent, and gets a twisted satisfaction from watching her have sex relations with his friend? Who could equal Thomas Sutpen (Absalom, Absalom!) in his total lack of compassion or love for humanity? There seems to be, then, no more reason for calling him a misogynist than a misanthrope. More than one critic has said that Faulkner shies away from giving a picture of the happy traditional society of the past. But it is not so much that he shies away from picturing such a society as that he knows it never existed.

To conclude, Faulkner's ideal women seem to belong to a social order in which girls are brought up to be emotionally mature, strong,

responsible, realistic individuals, providing a place for them whether they are spinsters or wives, and encouraging them to be useful members of society, and not idle, empty, shallow hypocrites or pathetic misfits. At least a few of his women achieve this ideal.

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